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BEYOND THE EASEL:
THE DISSOLUTION OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST PAINTING
INTO THE REALM OF ARCHITECTURE

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by

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BEYOND THE EASEL:
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A defining feature of American abstract expressionist painting is its enormous size and scale. Heroic ambition, the vast American landscape, and the sense of "something big" happening in American painting are often cited as determining factors in this phenomenon. This dissertation examines how Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko not only painted large-scale canvases but, following trends in modern architecture, shifted their painting towards the construction of architectural environments, thus promoting the transformation of painting from a window in the wall to a wall without a window. The artist and architect Tony Smith, a close friend and colleague of these painters, played an active role in encouraging their interest in modern architecture. As a result of their investigations into the physical, as well as conceptual, limits of the canvas, these artists shifted the viewer's experience from a perceptual experience of pictorial space to a physical encounter with actual space. In contradiction to the notion of the purely optical, one could describe this as a somatic viewing experience, tactile and active, which anticipated specific concerns of 1960s minimalism. This achievement redefines Pollock's, Newman's, and Rothko's legacy to the subsequent generation of artists and places their production into a broader historical framework.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In 1948 Clement Greenberg described what would become a defining characteristic of advanced painting as "a persistent urge to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality."[1] Since then historians and critics have cited heroic ambition, the vast American landscape, or simply the manifestation that "something big" had happened in American painting as determining factors in the greatly expanded size of the abstract expressionists' canvases**.** However, Greenberg proposed what might be a more compelling explanation when he wondered "if there is anything in modern architecture itself that explicitly invites this tendency."[2]

This dissertation responds to Greenberg's as yet unanswered question by reexamining developments in the work of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko—the progenitors of large canvases as well as the postwar era's most influential painters—which effectively achieve the dissolution of easel painting into the realm of architecture. While the architectural destination can certainly be seen as encouraging the size of their canvases, I argue that the paintings began to acquire a material density that emulated the architectural surfaces. These artists also shifted their painting toward the construction of architectural environments, thus promoting the transformation of painting from a window in the wall to a wall without a window. As the paintings became wall-like objects, their literal object-nature initiated a somatic viewing experience that the minimalists, whose work also reflects aspects of architectural form, would make a defining feature of their work in the 1960s.

Historians have generally acknowledged the radically expanded size of these paintings, but for the most part they have excluded architecture from their accounts of

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[1] Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 195.
[2] Ibid.

abstract expressionism. Instead, they have tended to look *into* these paintings, thereby failing to notice what artists, critics, dealers, and curators perceived at the time: as these paintings began to take on new size (physical measurement) and scale (internal proportion), they also acquired a material density and object-nature that resembled the vertical architectural surface. And as the canvases began to move toward the scale and tectonic opacity of the architectural plane, they also began to mimic the effects of architecture. The vast size itself of the paintings created a sense of space quite apart from depicted space, and their tectonic quality asserted a sense of place—effects more commonly associated with architecture. This is not to propose that Pollock, Newman, and Rothko imitated architectural ideas per se, but rather that their work came to express analogous ideas that resulted from their own investigations in expanding the physical and conceptual limits of the canvas.

The introductory chapter illustrates how these developments have their roots in the influence of the Bauhaus émigrés who arrived in the United States during the 1930s. Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius are in large part responsible for the development of a modernist architectural style in America, as well as a more general modernist ethos. Their philosophies, disseminated from the schools in which they taught, advocated the abandonment of narrative and historicizing elements and stressed the unification of form and function. (A modernist wall was itself conceived of as a "pure" surface, uninflected and undecorated.) In this context, I also consider the role of the Museum of Modern Art, which under the guidance of Philip Johnson advanced professional and popular interest in the European modernists by presenting exhibitions of their work throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Johnson, a defender of architecture as high cultural practice, organized symposiums, such as "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture" (1951), designed to encourage artists and architects to integrate the disciplines.

New York's commercial galleries are also included in this discussion**.** Throughout the 1940s and 50s several promoted collaborations between artists and architects, at least partly in response to the fact that those who collected abstract expressionist paintings also

commissioned modernist homes. Their exhibitions demonstrated the connection between abstract expressionism and modernist architecture by illustrating how the expansive, uninflected walls of modern homes could become natural sites for the large paintings, as can be seen in a catalogue statement from Kootz Gallery's 1950 show, "The Muralist and the Modern Architect": "The modern painter is in constant search of a wall—some large expanse upon which he can employ his imagination and personal technique on a scale uninhibited by the average collector limited space."[3] Only two years later Greenberg wrote of Newman that "[his paintings] constitute the first kind of painting I have seen that accommodates itself stylistically to the demand of modern interior architecture for flat, clear surfaces and strictly parallel divisions."[4]

Rather than draw specific lines of influence, each chapter tracks the role of architecture in the work of these individual artists. Chapter two begins with an overview of Mexican muralism and Works Project Administration mural projects to make clear the difference between the traditional type of mural painting that many of these artists admired throughout the 1930s and their own large-sized, large-scaled paintings. Pollock is the first artist I discuss, as he was the first to exploit the notion of what a large-scale abstract painting could be with his eight-by-twenty-foot *Mural* (1943) commissioned for the foyer of Peggy Guggenheim's townhouse. Significantly, *Mural* is more abstract than any of his previous works and contains an early instance of his allover technique, which would become so emblematic in his oeuvre. By the time of his 1950 show at Betty Parsons Gallery, his nine-by-eighteen foot paintings seemingly "replaced" the walls to create what a number of viewers would describe as an environment.

Each of these artists collaborated at one time or another with a noted modernist architect such as Peter Blake, Marcel Breuer, Philip Johnson, and Richard Meier. Their individual projects permitted the painters to develop their ideas on a deeper level and a greater scale. One of these projects includes perhaps the least discussed episode in

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[3] Samuel Kootz, "Introduction," *The Muralist and the Modern Architect* (New York: Kootz Gallery, 1950), n.p.

[4] Clement Greenberg, "Feeling Is All," 1952, *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 104.

Pollock's career: a cycle of paintings for a contemporary church designed by his close friend, the architect Tony Smith. Smith, in fact, figures prominently in both Newman's and Pollock's careers, which is fully explored for the first time in the second chapter. This investigation of Smith's experience and theories as an architect in relation to these two artists reveals a closer artistic association than historians, to date, have acknowledged. It also discusses newly discovered designs for proposed church projects that Smith felt would be pointless without a set of paintings by Pollock, Newman, or Rothko.

The third chapter is devoted to Newman, who argued that he never conceived of his paintings in architectural settings. Instead he thought of them as structural in and of themselves. For some viewers the huge paintings, consisting chiefly of flat surfaces of color, a minimum of gesture, and no trace of figuration, were becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate from the architecture. Newman actualized his ideas concerning "space" and "place"—two concepts integral to his artistic thinking—in architectonic, rather than planar, form when, as the only artist among architects, he produced a model synagogue for "Recent American Synagogue Architecture," an exhibition organized by Richard Meier in 1963. Critics have paid scant attention to Newman's synagogue, originally designed in 1951, yet it reflected ideas inherent in both his painting and sculptural works, and influenced his developing style.

Of all the abstract expressionists, Mark Rothko was unique in that he conceived of his work in architectonic terms. His monumental paintings of rectangular areas of color take on architectural proportions and in their scale and physical relationship to the viewer instigate a haptic as well as perceptual experience of the space. He alone among the abstract expressionists actually succeeded in creating a specific cycle of paintings designed to inhabit a specific building over which he had artistic control. Chapter four investigates the role of architecture in his early paintings and traces its appearance and ultimate influence as evidenced in the Rothko Chapel (1964–67)—initially designed by Johnson but completed, for the most part, by the artist. Here Rothko's paintings take on the scale and tectonic opacity of the architectural plane to such a degree that the paintings do not so much eclipse the architecture as the central focus of the room as they become

the architecture. The success of the Rothko chapel has effectively provided a context for all of Rothko's oeuvre, to the extent that it could be argued that we now view any Rothko as a fragment of a potential architecture.

I conclude my dissertation with a discussion of the largely unrecognized consonance between the aim of these artists in their later work and the purpose of the new generation of minimalists. Pollock, Newman, and Rothko each contributed to a new and radical conception of the relationship between the work and its viewer. As their canvases became larger and as they emphasized the sheer materiality of their painting, their work not only forged a new relationship with architecture, it shifted the viewing experience from one that was visually focused and two-dimensional to one that was bodily centered and by implication three-dimensional. Although it was the abstract expressionists who first achieved this fundamental shift, the minimalists would take the engagement of the viewer's body in space as their starting point. And unlike the abstract expressionists, the minimalists would also develop a discourse to both guide and describe their work, which drew on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

CHAPTER ONE

Cultural Context: A Modernist Ethos

In his 1948 assessment of contemporary modern art in America, Clement Greenberg made an important yet frequently overlooked observation, which serves as a springboard for this dissertation. In the essay, titled "The Situation at the Moment," Greenberg compared European and American art in an attempt to ascertain what he felt was a "master-current" in contemporary painting. Yet one of the most definitive statements that he makes in the course of his observations is that "easel painting is on its way out." As he explained, "There is a persistent urge, as persistent as it is largely unconscious, to go beyond the cabinet picture, which is destined to occupy only a spot on the wall, to a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality."[1] A painting that "would spread over" the wall, with its flatness aligning with the planarity of the vertical surface, obviously fit into Greenberg's modernist formulation. Indeed, he acknowledged that "Abstract painting, being flat, needs a greater extension of surface on which to develop its ideas than does the old three-dimensional easel painting." Greenberg could have left it at that, but instead he posited, "I do not know whether there is anything in modern architecture that explicitly invites this tendency."[2]

That Greenberg would associate painting with architecture, despite his emphasis upon maintaining "purity" among the arts, was not unusual.[3] Greenberg concentrated on the formal elements in modernist art, since he believed that these effectuated the

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[1] Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 194–195 (hereafter cited as *CEC*).
[2] Ibid., 195.
[3] In fact, "purity" in art does not exist for Greenberg, it is merely an aim. As he noted, "We should remember that no attempt at a 'pure' work of art has ever succeeded in being more than an approximation." Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 1949, *CEC*, vol. 2, 315.

experience necessary to the success of any modernist work. He argued for the renunciation of all aspects of illusion or representation and advocated the self-definition of each respective medium. Thus flatness in painting, inherently two-dimensional, and concrete physicality in three-dimensional sculpture comprised his concept of "purity" (later renamed "modernist reduction"). Architecture, in its concrete physicality, linear planarity, and lack of pictorial representation, accommodated Greenberg's formulations, especially in his early attempts to ascertain a unity of style in the visual arts within his concept of modernism.

Between 1940 and 1958 the relationship of architecture to the visual arts was a persistent theme in his writings. As early as 1940, in "Towards a Newer Laocoon," he had noted how flatness in painting might be modeled after functionalism in architecture when he stated that "Painting and sculpture can become more completely nothing but what they do: like functional architecture and the machine, they *look* what they *do*."[4] It was in this same essay that Greenberg first set forth his views on modernist art, yet in his attempt to address the complex distinctions between literature, music, painting, and sculpture, he admitted from the outset that "There has been, is, and will be, such a thing as a confusion of the arts."[5] Although Greenberg's conception of the entire history of modernist art involved a constant struggle of each art form to purify its means, he continually endeavored to ascertain a unity of style that encompassed painting, sculpture, and architecture. He recognized a confluence between forms that ultimately served the self-defining process of each. This echoed ideas of the early European avant-garde artists who explicitly sought a unification of the arts, but the time was now postwar America.

For Greenberg, architecture occupied a position as exemplar not only for painting but also for sculpture. In 1949 he claimed that International Style architecture was a manifestation of a new style that, like sculpture, "relies relatively little on expressive details. The plastic means are flat planes, lines, and enclosed spaces . . . The interest is in

[4] Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," 1940, *CEC*, vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, 34 (emphasis in the original).
[5] Ibid., 23.

lines of force, thrusts, in the 'activation of empty space.'"[6] In 1958 Greenberg singled out architecture as a benchmark for painting. "Painting," he stated, "continues as the leading and most adventurous as well as most expressive of visual arts; in point of recent achievement architecture alone seems comparable with it." [7] And further: "Painting, sculpture, architecture . . . have under modernism converged once again in a common style."[8] This "common style," now referred to as "modernist reduction," stressed the sensorial effect of the work of art as it continued to emphasize the exclusion of illusion or representation.

Greenberg's understanding of modern architecture likely derived from the Museum of Modern Art's 1932 landmark exhibition, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition," organized by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock, which proved to be one of the most influential as well as controversial shows of modern architecture ever presented. The Museum of Modern Art, in fact, played a key role in promoting a history of modernism that in many ways aligned with Greenberg's formulations. Further, by presenting exhibitions of modern architecture, they, too, underscored its relationship to painting as well as to sculpture.

Johnson and Hitchcock sought to define what they believed were the dominant trends in modern architecture. Modern architecture, as they conceived it, consisted of geometric forms, spatial volumes, planar surfaces, and exhibited proportion and regularity over axial symmetry. The exhibition included the work of architects as varied as Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, Erich Mendelsohn, J.J.P. Oud, Gerrit Rietveld, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright—although Johnson and Hitchcock's definition of modern architecture did not account for Wright's organic style. As William J.R. Curtis notes, Johnson and Hitchcock were "strong on the general, the

[6] Greenberg, "Our Period Style," 1949, *CEC*, vol. 2, 323.
[7] Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 1948; 1958 revised for publication in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 143 (hereafter cited as *AC*).
[8] Ibid., 144.

shared, and the typical, but weak on the personal, the practical, and the particular."[9] Indeed, Johnson and Hitchcock were widely criticized for making sweeping generalizations of the visual characteristics and features of the new architecture and for reducing the modern style to an aesthetic formula while neglecting its social implications and technological imperatives. As a result, the International Style—which acquired its name from the publication they collaborated on that year—soon came to be applied indiscriminately to virtually all modernist architecture from the 1920s to the 1970s, so that the "International Style" became synonymous with "modern architecture."

MoMA's "Modern Architecture" may have introduced a larger American audience to the work of European modernists, but anyone with even the slightest interest in architectural trends would have already been familiar with the general principles of Bauhaus design the exhibition championed. The reputation of the Bauhaus had extended beyond national boundaries from the time it was founded in 1919 in Weimar by Gropius. The Bauhaus was more than an institution; it was a philosophy as well as a movement, which continued to flourish in the United States even after Mies dissolved the school in Berlin in 1933. Already by the mid-30s, American journalists had reported on many of its ideas. The Bauhaus sought to synthesize painting, sculpture, and architecture, with the conviction that "the ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building" and that "architecture and sculpture and painting [would] one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers."[10] Relatively few examples of Bauhaus architecture were ever realized, although the Bauhaus Building, which Gropius designed for the Dessau school (1926), quickly became widely known. The Bauhaus Building represented Gropius's intention to produce an exemplary modern building that expressed the philosophy of the school, in which all the arts would be synthesized. Gropius disputed any notion of a Bauhaus style as did many of the teachers associated with the school, yet

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[9] William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon Press, 1982; 1996), 257.

[10] Reginald Isaacs, s.v., "Gropius, Walter," *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 253; quoted in Anthony Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and City Planning at Harvard* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 131.

they shared a visual vocabulary based on a notion of formal-aesthetic purity. Early on Gropius had argued that architecture's "identifying traits are clear, well-proportioned lines from which all unnecessary ingredients have been removed."[11]

The work of the Bauhaus architects was well received in the United States, where by the mid-1940s and 1950s the Bauhaus and International Style aesthetic had become the standard for modern architecture. These design principles were promoted by the Museum of Modern Art, which mounted what some have even called a propaganda campaign to influence design in the US. MoMA organized and presented numerous exhibitions in addition to "Modern Architecture," which included "Contemporary Architecture in California" (1935), "Modern Exposition Architecture" (1936), "The Recent Work of Le Corbusier" (1936), "Bauhaus 1919-1938" (1938–39), "Alvar Aalto: Architecture and Furniture" (1938), "Architecture of Eric Mendelsohn, 1914–1940" (1942), and a retrospective of the work of Mies van der Rohe (1948). The museum's founding director, Alfred Barr, also supported the promotion of modern architecture, which was at the core of his aesthetic. Barr in fact established the first department of architecture in a museum, and he was behind Johnson and Hitchcock's "Modern Architecture" exhibition. In the spring of 1948 Barr organized a symposium at MoMA titled "What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?" Its participants included Hitchcock, Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Peter Blake, among others, and it was designed to be an assessment of current styles.[12] Barr was an educator and envisioned the museum's exhibitions as an opportunity to educate the American public on the new architecture. Under his directorship, the museum organized a series of pedagogical exhibitions that traveled throughout the country to smaller regional museums as well as to colleges and universities. They included "Built in the U.S.A." (1944), which examined developments in modern architecture since 1932; "Modern Architecture for the Modern School" (1942), which presented a survey of innovative design in school architecture; and "What Is

[11] Walter Gropius in *Internationale Architektur*, 1925; quoted in Margret Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919-1936* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), xvi.
[12] Barr, Alfred H., Jr. "What Is Happening to Modern Architecture? A Symposium at the Museum of Modern Art," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 15 (Spring, 1948): 1–21.

Modern Architecture" (1938), which included Le Corbusier, Mies, and Alto along with American counterparts such as Louis Kahn, Raymond Hood, and Wright. These were followed in 1943 through 1945 by "American Architecture," "Pioneers of Modern Architecture," and "Modern American Architecture," which focused on the social and cultural forces that had formed modern architecture in the United States. The Museum of Modern Art was clearly a formidable force in promoting modern architecture and in educating the American public.

From as early as the 1930s, Philip Johnson also played a crucial role in promoting modern architecture in the United States. Johnson headed and personally financed MoMA's newly created department of architecture, which evolved out of the success of the "Modern Architecture" exhibition. It was under Johnson's guidance that MoMA regularly presented the work of the European modernists, as well as the work of Americans whom they had influenced. After a ten-year hiatus from curating during the period 1936–46 (he first pursued politics, then studied architecture at Harvard, after which he fulfilled his wartime service obligation), Johnson returned to organize his first major post-war exhibition, MoMA's retrospective of the architecture of Mies van der Rohe. Yet Johnson was also becoming increasingly interested in exploring the possibilities of a new synthesis between the arts, and he organized panels and symposiums to encourage artists and architects to integrate their disciplines. Johnson's focus was on the aesthetics of architecture; he even claimed that he had no interest in buildings except as works of art.[13] Since he understood the new architecture as an aesthetic phenomenon, it was a natural progression for him to see it in relation to contemporary painting and sculpture. His "Painting and Sculpture in Architecture" (1949) was a survey exhibition that presented the International Style as an architecture uniquely suited to the integration of modern painting and sculpture. The exhibition featured photographs that highlighted collaborations between architects and artists, and also included panels that discussed work ranging from Stonehenge to Frank Lloyd

[13] See Paul Goldberger, "Philip Johnson, Architecture's Restless Intellect, Dies at 98," *New York Times*, January 26, 2005.

Wright. The exhibition's press release announced the show as an "exhibition [that] surveys the history of the successful collaboration of architects, painters and sculptors, and points to the beginnings of a new cooperation of these artists within the modern movement."[14] It concluded," As modern architecture becomes an assured art rather than an experimental expression, architects, painters, and sculptors are learning to work together again, within the new idiom, toward a full synthesis of their arts comparable to the successful collaboration of past ages."[15]

Johnson followed "Painting and Sculpture in Architecture" with his 1951 symposium, "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture," a further opportunity to advance a discussion on the interdependence of art and architecture. Panel members included Hitchcock, Frederick Kiesler, and James Johnson Sweeney, who felt it "urgent" to reintegrate art and architecture since the "conception of any one of these [individual arts] in isolation is a limitation. Interrelated, as they have been in all the greatest periods of art, they contribute to one another. Isolated, they dry up, lose their associative values, become inbred, spiritually dwarfed."[16] The panel urged artists and architects to work in tandem in order to achieve a harmonious integration of contemporary abstract painting in modern architectural spaces. One audience member, Mark Rothko, eventually would.

New York's commercial art galleries also promoted collaborations between artists and architects, at least partly in response to the fact that those who collected abstract expressionist paintings also commissioned modernist homes. Beginning in 1944 and continuing over the next decade, the Bertha Schaefer Gallery mounted a series of annual exhibitions, each titled "The Modern House Comes Alive," which presented scale models of contemporary houses by prominent architects, whose interiors included works created by contemporary artists. Bertha Schaefer was an interior designer who subsequently

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[14] Press Release, "Painting and Sculpture in Architecture," Circulating Exhibitions, Box 89, The Museum of Modern Art Archives.
[15] Ibid.
[16] "A Symposium on How to Combine Architecture, Paintings, and Sculpture," *Interiors and Industrial Design* 110, no. 10 (May 1951): 100–105.

opened a gallery on Fifty-seventh Street where she could work directly with both artists and architects, as well as the public. According to one account, she knew "how to persuade her clients to buy consequential works of modern art instead of satisfying themselves with reproductions or shallow works of doubtful decorative value."[17] Indeed, the point of her exhibitions was to introduce her audience to modern residential architecture as well as to promote the use of contemporary paintings in its interior design. For the 1948 exhibition, Schaefer commissioned Peter Blake to write a short essay for the brochure in which he championed "true collaborations" between artists and architects.[18] But the show also reached out to interior designers. As Aline Louchheim reported, "the exhibition shows how paintings can be separate suggestive parts of a decorative scheme and it suggests that disagreements between decorators and art dealers are on the way to a solution."[19] That year the architects included Edward Durrell Stone along with lesser-known names, and the artists included Lee Krasner and others from the Schaefer stable. In the fall of 1948 the Mortimer Levitt Gallery, also on Fifty-seventh Street, held its own exhibition featuring collaborations between artists and architects. Frederick Gutheim reported that although the show included minor artists and the quality was not as consistent as Schaefer's exhibition, it still conveyed an "atmosphere of experiment and vitality . . . A new relationship among creative people is being explored."[20]

The Samuel Kootz Gallery also presented a succession of exhibitions in the same spirit, such as "The Muralist and the Modern Architect" (1950), which paired Johnson with William Baziotes, Breuer with Adolph Gottlieb, and Gropius's Architects Collaborative with Robert Motherwell. The exhibition, and others like it, demonstrated the connection between abstract expressionist painting and modernist architecture by

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[17] Justus Bier, "Art's Place in the Home," Louisville *Courier Journal*, Spring 1949. In Bertha Schaefer Papers and Gallery Records, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art (hereafter cited as AAA).
[18] Peter Blake, "The Interrelated Arts," brochure for "The Modern House Comes Alive," September 20–October 16, 1948, in Bertha Schaefer Papers, AAA.
[19] Aline B. Loucheim, "Gallery, Decorator, and Work of Art, Despite the Dissensions Interests in Common Are Prevailing," *New York Times,* September 26, 1948.
[20] Frederick Gutheim, "Arts and Architecture at Work in Two New Exhibitions," *Herald Tribune*, October 3, 1948.

illustrating how the expansive, uninflected walls of modern homes were natural sites for the large paintings. The next year Kootz organized "Art for a Synagogue," which once again paired artists with architects who were on the cutting-edge of religious architecture design. The exhibition resulted in commissions for several artists and also intensified Barnett Newman's interest in designing a synagogue, which he eventually did.

The period that spanned the years 1930–60 saw America develop its own modernist architecture out of the influence of European modernism. It was against this backdrop that a number of abstract expressionist painters increased the size and scale of their canvases to such a degree that they that effectively achieved the transformation of painting from the confines of the easel into the realm of architecture. The transformation began with Jackson Pollock.

CHAPTER TWO

Jackson Pollock: The Modern Feeling Is Toward the Wall Picture

> *"Mr. Pollock, would you care to comment on modern painting as a whole? What is your feeling about your contemporaries?"*
>
> *"Well, painting today seems very vibrant, very alive, very exciting. Five or six of my contemporaries around New York are doing very vital work, and the direction that painting seems to be taking here—is—away from the easel—into some sort, some kind of wall—wall painting."*
>
> —Jackson Pollock interviewed by William Wright, fall 1950[1]

Jackson Pollock is not only the best known of the abstract expressionists (for some he even defines the movement), but as a progenitor of the large, abstract expressionist canvas (a common denominator that unites each of the artists within this study), he was also the first of the postwar artists to work directly with modern architects and to seek modern architectural settings for his canvases.[2] This chapter tracks the direction of Pollock's painting that led to their dissolution into the realm of architecture. It begins by investigating Mexican muralism and Works Project Administration mural projects and their influence on Pollock's developing notions of what a large-scale painting could be. It next examines Pollock's first foray into mural painting, Peggy Guggenheim's wall-sized *Mural* (1943–44), titled as such, although it did not resemble the type of mural that people had become accustomed to seeing in their local post

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[1] Jackson Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," 1950. Reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 20 (hereafter cited as *JPIAR*).

[2] Of the 290 paintings that Pollock executed between 1943 and 1956, only sixty-six—less than a quarter—have either a height or width (but not necessarily both dimensions) measuring seventy-two inches or more. In contrast, 146 have smaller dimensions of about thirty-six by thirty-six inches. Jeffrey Wechsler and Donna Gustafson, who conducted a study, conclude that one half of Pollock's works are of modest size. It is the larger paintings, however, that tend to stand out most within the scope of Pollock's artistic production. See Claude Cernuschi and Andrzej Herczynski, "Cutting Pollock Down to Size: The Boundaries of the Poured Technique," in *Pollock Matters*, eds. Ellen G. Landau and Claude Cernuschi (Chestnut Hill, MA: McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, 2007), 74.

offices.[3] The question of what to call these works is a continuing theme, for they are neither easel nor mural paintings. In fact, as Pollock's paintings began to take on new size (physical measurement) and scale (internal proportion), they also acquired a material density and object-nature that resembled the vertical architectural surface on which they were installed. And as the canvases began to move toward the scale and tectonic opacity of the architectural plane, they also began to mimic the effects of architecture.

Piet Mondrian's architectural environments and Frederick Kiesler's display techniques are also considered. These two key figures are rarely examined in relation to Pollock's development as a painter. Key to this study is Pollock's interest in architecture and his eagerness to explore opportunities to work with architects or place his paintings in modern architectural settings. These occasions, specifically, Peter Blake's Ideal Museum, Marcel Breuer's binuclear home built for the Gellers, or even their installation from floor to ceiling in Betty Parsons Gallery, heightened the tendency of Pollock's paintings to be experienced as walls without windows as opposed to the traditional easel conception of a "window within a wall." It is at this point that Pollock's paintings were described as creating an environment.

In 1851, one hundred years before Pollock's interview with William Wright, Gottfried Semper published his well-known theory of the *Four Elements of Architecture*. Basing his theory on the form of the primitive hut, he categorized its construction into four basic elements of *Hearth, Roof, Mound* and *Fence.* For the last of these, the *Fence*, he proposed that the walls of ancient houses were not made of stone but rather of hanging cloth or woven 'mats', thus suggesting the idea of the wall as a textile hung off of the supporting structure, similar to the curtain wall today. Textile wall hangings evolved into paneling and paint that emulated their original textile origin. One hundred years later, when asked to comment on modern painting as a whole, Jackson Pollock reversed the

[3] In fact, one could say that Pollock's large-sized paintings initiated a new category of art object, just as Robert Rauschenberg invented "combines," Donald Judd championed "specific objects," and Frederick Kiesler coined "Correalism." Neither easel painting nor mural, no noun suitably characterizes his large paintings such as *Mural*. Similar is the struggle to find the right verb to describe Pollock's painting technique: drip, pour, splatter, spill, fling? The work as well as the process that defines Pollock remains hard to define.

evolution of Semper's proposition to claim that in postwar American painting, the canvases were edging toward "some kind of wall." It is the focus of this chapter to reveal how that happened.

Traditional Mural Painting: Background

Large-sized paintings had certainly been created before and, in fact, they figure prominently in Pollock's early development as a painter. Indeed, of all the abstract expressionists, Pollock was the most interested in and experienced with traditional mural painting. A "mural," from the Latin *muralis*, meaning "wall," is generally understood as a painting designed and created for a specific architectural interior that is usually, but not always, executed directly on the wall. Often located in municipal buildings, modern murals are generally a public art form. They typically express an historical or political message intended for a broad collective audience. Mural painting such as this was in its ascendancy in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, just as Pollock was beginning to study painting seriously.

Modern American murals were informed by and coincided with the Mexican mural movement best represented by "The Big Three": Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, all of whom in different ways influenced Pollock. These artists dedicated their art to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution and took as their subject traditional themes such as Mexico's history, customs, and development. Their point of view, however, as well as their style—a fusion of European modernism with art of the Renaissance and Baroque—was more modern, for they were also committed to the creation of a modern aesthetic. The Mexican mural movement greatly affected Pollock and many other artists of his generation, for their murals covered walls not only in Mexico, but also in the United States.[4] However, while Pollock was intrigued by the contemporary revival of traditional muralism, the large-scale paintings he made were never representational or narrative in nature. "Painting," he once said, "is not

[4] See Stephen Polcari, "Orozco and Pollock: Epic Transfigurations," *American Art* 6 (Summer 1992): 36–57. Also Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists*: *Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998).

illustration."[5] Thus, he never made a work that embraced the ideological program of Depression-era mural painting and he was largely indifferent to the utopian visions of the Mexican muralists.[6]

Above all, Pollock wanted to be an "advanced" artist. One of the ways in which he achieved this was to take key aspects from each of the Mexican muralists' work, synthesize them, and bring forth an amalgam all his own. He did not include their subject matter, but rather the artists' modern approach to it, their advanced techniques, and their use of innovative materials in addition to the grand size and scale of their paintings. In fact, one of the most crucial elements that Pollock derived from the Mexican muralists was the concept of painting as a wall or an environment.[7] Mexican mural painting provided Pollock with a model, which he used to develop his own ideas, ultimately extending the notion of mural painting into an entirely different form, unimagined by his predecessors. Yet its origins in more traditional mural painting remain significant.

Robert Storr traces Pollock's interest in muralism to 1929, when Pollock was still in his mid-teens and undecided as to whether he should pursue a career in art.[8] He wavered between studying painting or sculpture (he also briefly considered architecture), yet he was doubtful of his talent.[9] It was precisely at this moment that the artist's older

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[5] B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972), 29.

[6] Polcari describes Pollock's politics as "at best of the parlor and not the activist variety." Pollock identified with the Mexicans' conflict and struggle, but his was personal and internal—the psychological and emotional difficulties in addition to his alcoholism that plagued him throughout his life. Polcari, "Orozco and Pollock," 40.

[7] B.H. Friedman remarks on this, too, in his biography of the artist. See Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, 30.

[8] Storr's essay is one of the first to evaluate the Mexican muralists' influence on Pollock. Until its publication, scholars had either overlooked or minimized their impact on the young artist. Robert Storr, "A Piece of the Action," in *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches,* eds. Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 33–69. See also Ellen G. Landau, who notes that the Mexican muralists' impact on American avant-garde artists challenges widely held assumptions about abstract expressionism's predominantly Eurocentric origins. Ellen G. Landau, "Mexico and American Modernism: The Case of Jackson Pollock," in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context,* ed. Joan Marter (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 165–181.

[9] It was at this time that Pollock wrote his brothers Charles and Frank: "I am doubtful of any talent, so what ever I choose to be, will be accomplished only by long study and work. . . . Architecture interests me but not in the sense painting and sculpturing does." Jackson Pollock to

brother, Charles, enthusiastically wrote Jackson about the work that muralists Rivera and Orozco were doing in Mexico City.[10]

Charles was Jackson's oldest brother and the first in his family to pursue a career as a professional artist. He had studied at the Otis Art Institute, and came to New York in 1929 to work with Thomas Hart Benton at the Art Students League. Charles had a great influence upon his younger brother and encouraged him to pursue his interest in art by frequently sending him letters home about what he should see and read in order to cultivate Jackson's budding artistic ambitions. Charles also suggested that Jackson look into studying architecture, noting that "One of the finest architects in the country Lloyd Wright is living and working in Los Angeles . . . If architecture appealed to you there might be a splendid opportunity to serve an apprenticeship. My interest in mural painting definitely related to architecture has lead me lately to think of returning to Los Angeles if I could get work with Wright."[11] Thus it seems from his correspondence with Charles that Jackson would naturally entwine the notion of mural painting with architecture.

In his letters to Jackson, Charles was referring to the mural commissions that the Mexican government had begun subsidizing in the early 1920s to commemorate Mexican history and the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. Charles hailed Rivera's and Orozco's murals as "the finest work that has been done, I think, since the sixteenth century" and described the artists as "men with imagination and intelligence" who recognize "the implements of the modern world and [are] ready to employ them."[12] Pollock was impressed. Following his brother's letter, the young artist sought out articles on muralism, including one by Orozco in which he stated, "the highest, the most logical, the purest, strongest form of painting is the mural."[13]

Charles and Frank Pollock, October 22, 1929. Quoted in *Such Desperate Joy: Imagining Jackson Pollock*, ed. Helen A. Harrison (New York: De Capo Press, 2001), 7–8.

[10] Steven W. Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1989), 143 (hereafter cited as Naifeh/Smith).

[11] Charles Pollock, letter to his brother Jackson Pollock, probably summer 1929, Naifeh/Smith, 143.

[12] Storr, "Piece of the Action," 43.

[13] Ibid.

At a point when Pollock was beginning to seriously question whether or not he should pursue a career as an artist, mural painting appeared to him as an attractive venture. It was an estimable art form as well as a modern one. According to Harold Lehman, a friend of Pollock's from these early years, while most other artists were looking at Cubism, the prevailing modernist style of the late 1920s and early 30s, Pollock's idea of modern art was the work of Diego Rivera.[14] Pollock was impressed by the way that Rivera took the folkloric themes he drew upon for his subject matter and reworked them into contemporary forms done in a semi-abstract style. While Rivera's compatriot and colleague Orozco worked in a similar vein, Pollock seems to have been drawn more to his stylized, dynamic expressionism, which he deemed quite modern. He was especially taken by Orozco's giant mural of *Prometheus* (1930), which he had seen at Pomona College in Claremont, California, before coming to New York. He pronounced it "the greatest painting done in modern times."[15]

When Pollock moved to New York in the late summer of 1930, all three Mexican muralists were busy working on commissions there. He observed Orozco painting a cycle of five frescoes for the New School (1930-31). He also witnessed Rivera's ill-fated sixty-three-foot *Man at the Crossroads,* commissioned for Rockefeller Center, as well as portable murals—painted, moveable wall panels—that the artist completed for the New Workers School on West Fourteenth Street (all from 1933). In 1940 Orozco embarked on one of his most abstract works—*Dive Bomber and Tank,* a portable mural commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art for its *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art Exhibition*. Pollock watched Orozco complete the work at the museum and it is possible that the concept of making large, moveable paintings that Pollock realized in 1947–50 may have come from these artists. However, Orozco and Rivera still worked in the more traditional fresco technique. For a more modern medium, Pollock turned to Siqueiros.

The Mexican muralists are typically lumped together as a homogeneous whole, yet each was quite different in approach, technique, and ideology. Siqueiros employed

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[14] Ibid.
[15] Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, 29; Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1985), 49; Naifeh/Smith, 298.

much more modern tools and materials—spray guns, still photography and movie cameras to plan mural compositions, and industrial paints—because he felt they best expressed the social function of modern muralism. In 1936, Siqueiros opened the Experimental Workshop (A Laboratory of Modern Techniques in Art), a place where artists could focus on creating revolutionary twentieth-century art forms. Pollock worked at the W. Fourteenth Street Workshop until it closed in early 1937 when Siqueiros left for Spain and its members eventually drifted apart. Although the Workshop artists concentrated more on experimental easel paintings, posters, and floats for May Day celebrations rather than murals, it was there that Siqueiros introduced Pollock to the use of Duco as well as the pouring or dripping method of applying paint to the canvas, and the technique of painting horizontally on the floor, which was not an uncommon procedure in the Workshop.[16]

At this point Pollock was well acquainted with Siqueiros' murals, including his *Tropical America* (1932) in Los Angeles that his brother Sande had worked on. Since the Experimental Workshop continued and expanded upon many of Siqueiros' innovative approaches to mural painting, Pollock may also have been aware of his 1933 *Plastic Exercise*, a work he completed in the basement of a country house in Argentina. Composed primarily of large nudes and monstrous figures, the painting had nothing to do with revolutionary politics since it was created for a private home. Siqueiros considered it "a project of abstract art," yet its importance lies in the fact that it was an experimental mural project that led to an important innovation.[17] Sited for a long, tunnel-shaped basement, Siqueiros carefully considered and plotted out the movement of potential spectators within the room. This resulted in a much more dynamic rather than purely

[16] While paint was poured, dripped, and splattered in Siqueiros's Experimental Workshop, Pollock's drip technique has also been traced to Francis Picabia's 1917 spilled-ink drawings; Joan Miró and André Masson's aleatory paintings from the 1920s; Hans Hofmann and Max Ernst, who both experimented with a drip technique in 1942–43 (about the same time that Pollock did); and Janet Sobel, an amateur painter whom Clement Greenberg introduced to Pollock in 1946. Pollock also experimented with sprayed paints, a technique that Siqueiros taught in the 1930s. Evidence of sprayed paints appears in *Lavender Mist: Number 1, 1950*. See Storr, "Piece of the Action," 52; and James Coddington, "No Chaos Damn It," in *New Approaches*, 101–115.
[17] Siqueiros in Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists,* 149.

passive relationship between the viewer and mural within the architectural environment. According to one scholar, the viewer "forcefully encounters—rather than passively sees" the imagery within the work.18 Pollock's large-scale paintings, while less carefully plotted out, would produce a similar effect, yet void of any recognizable imagery.

The one artist who had the greatest impact upon Pollock in the 1930s was Thomas Hart Benton, especially his work as a muralist.[19] Benton was the premier Depression-era Regionalist who took as his themes American life and legends for his narrative murals. Although he always retained recognizable subject matter, according to Erika Doss, Benton wanted to "reconstruct the world in modern murals."[20] His murals maintained a modern aesthetic in their abandonment of Renaissance perspective, rhythmic compositions, abstract patterns, and a dynamism that tends to grab the viewer's attention.

In the early 1930s, Pollock took mural painting classes with his soon-to-be mentor at the Art Students League and even posed as a steelworker for Benton's first mural commission, a nine-panel production entitled *America Today*, completed in 1931 for the walls of a boardroom at the New School for Social Research.[21] The next year Pollock wrote to his father, "Benton has just gotten another big mural job—for the Whitney Museum of American Art. Mural painting is forging to the front."[22] Pollock was referring to *The Arts of Life in America*, a mural series consisting of four huge wall panels and four ceiling panels, done for the Whitney Museum's library (1932). The next year Benton completed his landmark twenty-two-panel mural for Indiana Hall at Chicago's "Century of Progress" World's Exposition (1933). Again, Pollock wrote to his father, "Benton is

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[18] Laurance P. Hurlburt, "The Siqueiros Experimental Workshop: New York, 1936," *Art Journal* 35, no. 3 (Spring 1976), 237.

[19] See Francis V. O'Connor, "The Genesis of Jackson Pollock: 1912–1943," *Artforum* 5, no. 9 (May 1967): 16–23. Benton, unlike Siqueiros, did not work in modern media, but instead often executed his large mural paintings in egg tempera, in the tradition of the sixteenth-century *fresco secco*.

[20] Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 14.

[21] The mural is now located in the Midtown Manhattan atrium of the Equitable Tower at the Equitable Center, New York.

[22] Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 4:212 (hereafter cited as *JPCR*).

beginning to be recognized as the foremost American painter today," adding "He has lifted art from the stuffy studio into the world and happenings about him."[23] The Indiana Murals landed Benton on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1934, where he was lauded as one of the leading figures among the so-called Regionalists.[24] Mural painting, it seemed, brought large-scale recognition in more ways than one.

Like many artists of his generation, Pollock joined the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935, the year of its inception.[25] He first worked in the Mural Division, which mainly attracted Regionalists and Social Realists, who could be counted on to fulfill large-sized, thematic commissions. Every mural had to have a sponsor, be it a school, public library, or similar municipal institution, and they all requested traditional murals that were representational in nature. As such, while more than a thousand murals were begun during the program's first year, only a fraction of those that were installed were abstract.[26] George McNeil, a colleague of Pollock's from that time, recalled "There were a lot of us working on abstract murals, but the whole thing was sort of mythical. We'd do murals and nothing ever came of them. They were never put in place."[27] Lee Krasner also recalled that while there were a number of abstract artists working in the Mural Division, they were only allowed to paint what those "in charge" designated because "unfortunately the public taste did not request abstract murals."[28] Unlike the Mexican government who granted complete stylistic freedom to their artists as long as they adhered to Mexican subjects, the WPA placed restrictions upon artists wishing to make more abstract large-scale paintings, which frustrated many

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[23] Deborah Solomon, *Jackson Pollock: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 51.
[24] This was an honor never before awarded to an artist. The article linked Benton with two other Midwestern artists, John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood. From that point on, Benton was best known to the public as the leader of the "Regionalist Movement" in American art.
[25] The Federal Art Project was established in May of that year. It was followed by the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), in existence from July 1935 until June 1939, under which fewer than one hundred murals were created.
[26] Naifeh/Smith, 275.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Oral history interview with Lee Krasner conducted by Barbara Rose, July 31, 1966. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as AAA). http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/krasne66.htm

of them. This may have been why Pollock soon transferred to the Easel Division. Not only was he uninterested in the WPA's ideological program, the Easel Division was also less restrictive. It permitted artists to work in their own studios without any supervision, which would have appealed to the free-spirited young artist. Interestingly, many of the abstract artists who did paint murals for the WPA program, such as Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and Philip Guston, did not go on to create significant large-scale paintings afterwards.[29]

Only once, in 1934–35 did Pollock attempt to create a traditional mural. He was most likely inspired by the success and visibility that mural painting had brought his colleagues, and as an unemployed artist during the Depression, certainly would have been eager to earn a little money. Pollock proposed a design to Greenwich House, a social service organization (that still exists) located in Greenwich Village, at that time New York's most congested neighborhood. It was to have a musical theme, which would have been in accordance with Greenwich House's music program. Studies indicate that the mural would have featured a group of musicians playing harmonica, accordion, banjo, and a horn.[30] Unfortunately, the project was never executed. Pollock scholar Francis O'Connor counts two other instances from the 1930s as Pollock mural projects, but since neither exist any longer, it's impossible to give them fair consideration.[31] The first one O'Connor describes as a "pornographic . . . vast, lewd, mural in the style of Orozco" that was done in 1935 in an abandoned commercial building on West Houston Street where Pollock lived for a time with his brother Sande, possibly inspired by Orozco's *Catharsis*,

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[29] See Francis V. O'Connor, "Jackson Pollock's Mural for Peggy Guggenheim: Its Legend, Documentation, and Redefinition of Wall Painting," in *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler: The Story of Art of This Century*, eds. Philip Rylands and Susan Davidson (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2004), 163.

[30] *JPCR*, 1:8. The harmonica player may have been in homage to Thomas Hart Benton, who played the instrument on a professional level. He was a gifted musician who also collected folk tunes, produced a record for Decca, and invented a new form of musical notation for the harmonica that is still used by music publishers. Benton would later feature Pollock in the *Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley* (1934) playing a harmonica. Pollock had also studied sculpture at Greenwich House, which offered informal art classes.

[31] See Francis V. O'Connor, "Jackson Pollock: A Note About [His] Murals," in *JPCR Supplement Number One* (New York: The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, 1995), 52–53.

completed that year at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.[32] The second was a highly informal and spontaneous creation that came into being some time in the early 1940s when one of Pollock's friends, Harold Faye, gave a party in his West Fourteenth Street apartment and afterwards he and Faye stood on the bed and painted the figure of a woman with a green beard. It was eventually painted over.[33]

Pollock Points a Way: Peggy Guggenheim's *Mural*

Up until the early 1940s, despite his attempts and no matter his ambitions, Pollock remained, for all intents and purposes, an easel painter. That is, his paintings were generally small in size, their composition maintained an internal sense of constriction, and they hung on the wall as separate, autonomous entities. This changed in the spring of 1943, when Peggy Guggenheim, Pollock's first dealer, commissioned a painting from him for the entrance hall of the townhouse apartment she had recently rented. Guggenheim's new residence was not the achievement of a modern architect, but the long foyer, measuring thirty-five feet in length, provided the artist with an expansive surface on which to work that was similar to the uninflected walls typical of modernist homes being built at that time. Initially, in true mural fashion, Pollock was to have painted the work directly on the wall. However, Marcel Duchamp suggested that he create a "portable mural," so that Guggenheim could take it with her when she moved. The idea of a portable mural was not a new one and Pollock was well aware of Orozco's, Rivera's, and Benton's large-scale portable mural painting from the 1930s. Further, as O'Connor notes, most of the Treasury Department's Post Office murals were painted on canvas in the artists' studios and later installed in situ, as were the WPA murals that were subsequently carried to and hung in hospitals and institutions where it was not practical to install them permanently.[34]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] O'Connor, "Pollock's Mural for Guggenheim," 168n53. Another precedent for a "portable mural" may be *Guernica* (1937), Pablo Picasso's famous mural without a wall, which measures 11' 6" x 25' 8". Pollock admired Guernica, which had an impact on many New York artists when it was first exhibited at the Valentine Dudensing Gallery in the spring of 1939. It was later

With a roughly eight-by-twenty-foot stretch of blank canvas in front of him, Pollock wrote to his brother Charles that Guggenheim had commissioned him to complete a large painting "With no strings as to what or how I paint it. I am going to paint it in oil, on canvas . . . I've had it stretched now. It looks pretty big, but exciting as all hell."[35] (fig. 2.1) Pollock worked on the painting throughout the late summer and early fall of 1943, completing it in time to coincide with his first exhibition at Guggenheim's Art of This Century in November.[36] The result of his efforts was a synthesis, yet complete reinterpretation of what he had learned from Mexican muralism, Benton, and his experience on the WPA. *Mural* redefined previous notions of twentieth-century mural painting and launched Pollock's trajectory, culminating in his drip/pour paintings of the late 1940s and early 1950s that exhibit an architectonic quality i.e. a material density that caused viewers as well as architects to either equate or treat them as walls as well as speak of their ability to create an environment much as actual architecture would do.

From his predecessors, Pollock learned to "think big," and *Mural* was his largest canvas to date—ultimately the biggest painting that he would ever produce. Secondly, it was modern, for *Mural*'s significance also lies in the fact that it is the first of his truly abstract paintings.[37] With its turbulent mass of gestural loops that churn across almost

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installed at New York's Museum of Modern Art for safekeeping during the Franco regime in Spain where it remained until 1981.

[35] Ibid.,153.

[36] O'Connor brings to light new evidence that debunks the myth that Pollock executed the painting overnight in a sudden burst of energy. Ibid., 151–69.

[37] Even though *Mural* is a wholly abstract painting, many viewers insist on identifying recognizable imagery within the composition, most often a series of black stick figures, which has resulted in some interesting observations. W. Jackson Rushing determined that they were related to the Hopi Indian Kokopelli kachina, humpbacked flute players with female figures clinging to their backs. Pollock's friend Harry Jackson recalled that the artist did intend a representational subject: a stampede of horses. According to Jackson, the horses eventually got away from Pollock, which is when he began to "sling" paint on the canvas. Caroline Jones builds on this anecdote to claim that "by the inclusion of animals long eliminated from the land, we can recognize Pollock's narrative as *restitutive*—restoring, but also releasing and transmogrifying the conflicted memory of his participation in that senseless hunt for wild horses." See W. Jackson Rushing, "Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism," in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 284–85; Harry Jackson in O'Connor, "Pollock's Mural for Guggenheim," 161; Caroline A. Jones,

twenty feet of canvas, *Mural* anticipates the "allover" effect that characterizes his "classic" paintings of the late 1940s and early 1950s (fig. 2.2).[38] The composition has no beginning, end, or center; no up or down; no sense of top or bottom. Nor is there any distinction between foreground and background, which makes it spatially shallow. This results in greater emphasis upon its two-dimensionality. Further, photographs of *Mural*'s early states reveal splatters and trails left by dripping paint, and although Pollock later integrated most of them into the finished work, *Mural* represents an early foray into his now signature "drip" technique (although he painted it vertically and not on the floor).

So what is *Mural*? Is it an easel painting or a mural? To his brother Charles, Pollock described it as a "large painting." In his letter to Lee Krasner, he referred to the painting as a "mural." John Little recalled that it was Lee who gave the painting its title, "one as accurate as she was: *Mural*," which is not, in fact, very accurate at all. [39] Storr maintains that it is "an easel picture, just bigger," although he never defines his notion of an easel picture. He complicates the matter by likening it to Orozco's *The Dictators*, which is a mural painting. I assume he accepts *Mural* as a big easel painting because it was not measured precisely for its architectural destination where it would fit exactly within its niche and because he reads it as figurative painting, which he equates with easel pictures. Storr also writes "comparatively few of [Pollock's] large paintings are of mural proportions," which begs the question, "What are mural proportions?"[40] O'Connor hails it as "America's first influential large-scale easel painting." And Caroline Jones describes it as an "a wall-sized planar surface that could be read as 'décor'."[41] The

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Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 229.

[38] It is not unusual for scholars to refer to Pollock's drip/pour paintings as "classic," which is problematic because it diminishes the importance of any painting that he did not execute in the drip/pour method. For a few examples of the use of "classic," see E.A. Carmean, Jr., "The Church Project: Pollock's Passion Themes," *Art in America,* vol. 70, no. 6 (Summer 1982): 70–76, 110–22; Rosalind Krauss, "Contra Carmean: The Abstract Pollock," *Art in America* vol. 70, no. 6 (Summer 1982): 123–31, 155; Kirk Varnedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," in *Jackson Pollock* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 15–85.

[39] Potter, *Violent Grave*, 75.

[40] See Storr, "Piece of the Action," 61.

[41] Jones, *Eyesight Alone,* 240.

decorative is a consistent theme as concerns large-sized paintings and will be discussed later.

It's difficult to describe *Mural* as an easel painting given its dimensions and the fact that it was made for a specific wall. However, technically speaking, neither is it a mural because it was not painted directly on the wall. Nor does *Mural* deal with a political or historical subject that addresses a collective public. Further, and perhaps most importantly, Pollock did not intend the viewer to examine the painting part-by-part in order to discern a message, or to view the work from afar as one does with a mural by Benton, Orozco, Siqueiros, or Rivera.[42] Instead, Pollock made use of Guggenheim's narrow hallway to enforce upon the viewer a direct and close confrontation with the work. Since the hallway measured thirteen feet by six inches in width, the viewer did not have enough distance to take in the canvas's entire twenty-foot length, for one could not step back to take in the entire breadth of the painting without coming up against the opposite wall. The painting forces an aesthetic encounter upon the viewer while simultaneously conveying a sense of being walled in. With *Mural,* Pollock instigated a physical rather than purely visual experience of painting.[43] As O'Connor notes, in such close proximity "*Mural* is hard to sort out visually. Within thirteen feet you cannot see the outer edges. It totally envelops you."[44]

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[42] Benton, when asked to explain the difference between a mural and an easel painting, replied that "Generally a mural is much larger and its theme likely to be more complicated as to subject matter. . . . It must have a logical design, which the moving eye of the spectator is constrained to follow." Further, "You can't generally grasp a mural all at once. You may be able to see it all at once, but you are likely to explore it by walking before it. . . . A small painting can be grasped at once—at one shot of the eye, as we say." Oral history interview with Thomas Hart Benton conducted by Paul Cummings, July 23–24, 1973, AAA.

[43] Pollock's large-sized paintings also have a tendency to draw viewers in. Watch visitors who approach any of his big paintings in museum collections and you will see how, after reading the wall label and taking a step back, they are immediately drawn back in toward the painting's surface.

[44] O'Connor also writes that the optimum distance for viewing a "big" Pollock is about eighteen to twenty feet—the width of his two studios (the one on Eighth Street and the Springs). However, Pollock painted the large works on the floor and O'Connor's theory implies that Pollock would have watched the paintings achieve resolution while they were hanging vertically on the studio wall. O'Connor, "Pollock's Mural for Guggenheim," 167.

When *Mural* was first exhibited publicly, the reviewer Manny Farber described the painting as a "wild abstraction . . . so well ordered that it composes the wall in a quiet, contained, buoyant way."[45] What he observed was the way in which *Mural*'s shallow space resists optical penetration into the fictive pictorial depth. There is a sense of impenetrable materiality that emphasizes the painting's two-dimensionality and by extension, closely aligns it with the wall upon which it was installed. This feeling was augmented by the fact that, as it was installed, the painting took up almost the entire length of the wall.[46] In fact, originally, *Mural* was to remain unframed, but Guggenheim did not provide the supplier with the entry wall's precise measurements when ordering the canvas and stretcher. And even though Pollock had inspected the site before embarking on the commission, when the finished painting arrived, it soon became apparent that it was one foot shorter than the distance from the floor to the ceiling.[47] Because both Pollock and Guggenheim wanted the painting to look as if it were part of the wall, rather than "just a very awkwardly placed big easel painting," Guggenheim hired a carpenter to increase the width of the ceiling molding and to construct a frame in order to increase the painting's height by an additional four inches.[48] As a result, the painting could encompass the wall so that it would "*spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality," as Greenberg would soon describe the tendency of large, abstract paintings.[49]

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[45] Manny Farber, "Jackson Pollock," 1945, reprinted in *JPIAR*, 153.
[46] Francis O'Connor has recently proven that Marcel Duchamp *did not* cut one foot off of the painting in order to make it fit on Guggenheim's wall. As he reveals, the painting was not longer than the wall, but about a foot shorter than the ceiling. Guggenheim's wall measured approximately 20 feet; *Mural* measures 19 feet and 9 ½ inches in length. O'Connor, "Pollock's Mural for Guggenheim," 158.
[47] In July 1943 Pollock wrote to Krasner that he had seen the wall space for the proposed mural. Pollock in *JPCR*, 4:153.
[48] O'Connor, "Pollock's Mural for Guggenheim," 158.
[49] Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 195 (hereafter cited as *CEC*).

Mural remained in Guggenheim's apartment until early 1947, when she decided to include it in Pollock's fourth and final exhibition at Art of This Century.[50] It was one among fifteen paintings in the show, which also included his three largest from 1946: *The Key, The Waterbull*, and *The Blue Unconscious*, each measuring at least seven feet in length.[51] Greenberg combined his review of the exhibition with one on Jean Dubuffet who was making his American debut down the street at Pierre Matisse Gallery.[52] Greenberg liked Dubuffet. He had recently hailed him as a "most original painter" and "the brightest new hope of the School of Paris since Miró."[53] In some ways he was the French Jackson Pollock. Both emphasized painting's materiality, and Dubuffet attacked the human figure in his work with the same gusto that Pollock brought to his abstract imagery. At first, Greenberg's comparison of the two artists is favorable: he commends their treatment of surface, handling of material, and the allover quality to their paintings. But in the end, Greenberg judges Dubuffet the lesser artist because of what he had earlier described as Dubuffet's "literary leanings."[54] For Greenberg, Dubuffet remained an old-

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[50] The exhibition ran from January 14 through February 1, 1947. When Guggenheim closed her gallery in the spring of 1947, she loaned the painting to Yale University. It subsequently went on view in MoMA's "Large-Scale Modern Paintings" show (April 1–May 4, 1947). Guggenheim had gifted the painting to the University of Iowa in 1948, but it did not arrive there until 1951. The University first installed *Mural* in the Art Building's mural studio, and from 1952 to 1969, it hung high up on the west wall of the University Library. It was subsequently installed in the University's museum where it now takes pride of place. While *Mural* is one of Pollock's most important paintings, it received little critical attention due to its size as well as location in Iowa. Its size—7' 11 ¾" x 19' 9 ½"— has prevented it from being included in major museum exhibitions, although MoMA included it in its 1999 "Jackson Pollock" retrospective. For the painting's early exhibition history and reception at the University of Iowa, see Rudolf E. Kuenzli**,** "Jackson Pollock's Mural," in *Art and Social Change*, eds. Robert Hobbs and Frederick Woodard (Iowa City: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1986), 111–30.

[51] It is not known on which wall Guggenheim installed *Mural*. Presumably the painting was exhibited in the Daylight Gallery, the only available space for changing exhibitions. However, the 19' 9 ½" wide canvas would have extended more than a foot beyond the longest available wall in the Daylight Gallery's East Room, which measured 18' 5".

[52] January 7–February 1, 1947.

[53] See Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of School of Paris Painters," 1946; and "Jean Dubuffet and French Existentialism," 1946, *CEC,* vol. 2, 90 and 91.

[54] See "Review of an Exhibition of School of Paris Painters," 87–90. This was the first time that Greenberg discussed the artist's work at any length. Dubuffet's literary leanings included French Existentialism. See Kent Minturn, "Greenberg Misreading Dubuffet," in *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, 125–37. For the critic's definitive position on the necessity of

fashioned easel painter whose work continued the tradition of the "framed window." Pollock, on the other hand, having renounced subject matter in favor of pure abstraction, "is less of an easel painter in the traditional sense than Dubuffet." And with this, Greenberg concluded, "Pollock points a way beyond the easel, beyond the mobile, framed picture, to the mural," adding with what would become characteristic ambivalence when discussing Pollock, easel painting, and murals in general, "perhaps – or perhaps not. I cannot tell."[55]

"Something Else Hard to Define"

Aesthetically as well as theoretically, easel painting is more complicated than a canvas's dimensions. And although Pollock was primarily an easel painter up until Guggenheim's *Mural,* there are aspects of easel painting that do not apply to his earlier work. For example, he never employed heavy or ornate frames traditionally associated with easel painting, which made them like "packaged" commodities. Further, due to their highly abstract nature, no middle-class market sought his early canvases as decorative objects with which to embellish their homes. In the early 1940s, Pollock's work received hardly any interest at all from any collectors. Instead, Pollock preferred unframed or minimally framed canvases. His later drip/pour paintings would appear congruent with the wall upon which they were hung precisely because they were unframed, creating a dialogue between the architectural environment and the painting. Another concept primarily associated with easel painting is that of the illusionistic window-in-the-wall, which Pollock's paintings decidedly were not. In fact, as the dimensions of his paintings grew, they became more like walls without windows. That Pollock made paintings that

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eliminating any trace of literature from painting, see also Greenberg "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," (1939); and "Towards a Newer Laocoön," (1940), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5–22; 23–38 (hereafter cited as *CEC*).

[55] Varnedoe claims that this "closing pose of speculative uncertainty was disingenuous, for Greenberg was determined that this was the direction his protégé should follow. Pollock for his part was more than willing to couch his future in the terms his key supporter thought requisite." Varnedoe, *Pollock*, 1998, 43.

did not fit the easel or mural tradition made things somewhat confusing for all, including Greenberg who could not quite decide what to call them.

From his first review of the artist in 1943, Pollock's paintings gave Greenberg trouble, for he found two of them vacillated between easel and mural: "Both [*Guardians of the Secret*] and *Male and Female* zigzag between the intensity of the easel picture and the blandness of the mural."[56] Each canvas measures over six feet—hardly easel paintings.[57] But in the "larger format," Greenberg complained, "he spends himself in too many directions at once," a slackening of power and focus that, presumably, is what lent them the quality of a mural in Greenberg's eyes. More than ten years later, even after declaring that Pollock had achieved control of his painting, Greenberg remained undecided. "[Pollock]," he declared, still "found himself straddled between the easel picture and something else hard to define."[58] The issue of easel or mural in describing Pollock's work was a problem Greenberg never resolved, a problem that continues to this day. The "something else hard to define" is a central concern of this study.

Legacy of Mondrian

> *"Those whose point of departure is Mondrian will no longer be easel painters."*
>
> —Clement Greenberg, 1944[59]

Piet Mondrian might seem an unlikely artist to enter into a discussion of Pollock's paintings. His grid compositions are tightly controlled; they are small in scale, and limited to primary colors. Pollock's works have always been much looser and often viscous, many of his canvases are quite large, and while less of a colorist than some of

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[56]Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Marc Chagall, Lyonel Feininger, and Jackson Pollock," 1943, *CEC,* vol. 1, 165.
[57] They included *Male and Female* (1942), which measures 6' 1" x 49" and *Guardians of the Secret* (1943), which measures 48 3/8" x 6' 3 3/8".
[58]Greenberg cites "the oscillation between an emphatic physical surface and the suggestion of depth" beneath it. Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 226.
[59] Greenberg, "Obituary of Mondrian," *CEC,* vol. 1, 187.

his peers, Pollock generally employed a varied palette. Mondrian formulated and continually advanced a dogmatic approach to painting from which he did not waver. Pollock was more of a forager, taking what he needed from others without mimicking their technique, style, or approach to result in an artistic identity all his own.[60] The two artists also differed in temperament and background, yet their paintings do share commonalities especially in their ability to create an environment. Greenberg was the first to allude to this.

When Mondrian died in 1944, Greenberg wrote an obituary in which he observed, "I am not sure whether Mondrian himself recognized it, but the final intention of his work is to expand painting into the décor of the man-made world—what of it we see, move in, and handle."[61] Mondrian would not have agreed, for as far as he was concerned, "Neo-Plasticism seemingly lends itself to decoration (through its planarity) but actually the 'decorative' has no place in the Neo-Plastic conception."[62] For Mondrian, the decorative implied an arbitrary arrangement of forms that could not result in balanced relations necessary to produce an expression of harmony or achieve harmony, the touchstone of Neo-Plasticism. However, it cannot be denied that Mondrian influenced graphic, industrial, and interior design. [63] Rietveld's "Red and Blue Chair" from 1918 is a famous example of this. His impact on fashion and design escalated after his death when

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[60] As Rob Storr rightly notes, Pollock "tried anything that he responded to emotionally and that he thought he could use. A synthetic painter, Pollock was not radical by virtue of inventiveness—precedents can be named for almost every aspect of his work. He was, however, radical in his unanticipated applications of things he had learned during his catch-as-catch-can process of appropriation and imperfect assimilation." Storr, "Piece of the Action," 34.

[61] Clement Greenberg, "Obituary of Mondrian," 1944, *CEC,* vol. 1, 188.

[62] Piet Mondrian, "The Realization of Neo-Plasticism in the Distant Future and in Architecture Today," 1922, in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, eds. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986), 172.

[63] Yve-Alain Bois writes that Mondrian had more of a reputation as a designer than as a painter when he arrived in New York in 1940, but this is debatable. In the 1930s, the American Abstract Artists recognized him as one of the most important founders of abstract art. They knew of his work through *de Stijl*, the journal he had founded in 1917 with Theo van Doesburg. They could also see his work firsthand in the permanent collection of A.E. Gallatin's Museum of Living Art, the first public collection of modern art, as well as in the Museum of Modern Art, although Bois writes that these works were seen as hypothetical models rather than easel paintings. Yve-Alain Bois, "Mondrian and the Theory of Architecture," *Assemblage*, no. 4 (October 1987): 102.

"Bastard Mondrians, with their printed grids of black lines and their rectangles of primary blue, red and yellow, turned up on every flat surface that industry made—from tea towels to Courrèges dresses, from cigarette packs to apartment façades."[64] But when Mondrian arrived in New York in 1940, he was preceded not only by his work, but also his aesthetic doctrine, a key element of which involved the dissolution of boundaries between painting and architecture. Greenberg would also have been aware of Mondrian's lifelong wish to integrate painting with architecture, which, in fact, was the ultimate intention of his utopian vision.[65]

In a late "interview" with James Johnson Sweeney, Mondrian told the MoMA curator: "I feel that painting can become much more real, much less subjective, much more objective, when its possibilities are realized in architecture in such a way that the painter's capabilities are joined with the constructive ones."[66] Opportunities arose for Mondrian to accomplish this when, in 1921, Léonce Rosenberg proposed a Paris residence-cum-gallery or the *Salon de Madame B á Dresden* Mondrian designed on paper in 1926, but both projects were unrealized.[67] It became apparent to Mondrian that such constructions would not only be expensive but time-consuming, which forced him to place the goal of integrating painting and architecture in a teleological perspective. He did, however, create a semblance of this integration on the numerous occasions when he transformed his studio into a painting by arranging rectangular planes of color, plus black, white, and gray, upon its walls.[68] It was around 1919 that Mondrian began treating

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[64] Robert Hughes, "Art: Pursuit of the Square," *Time Magazine*, November 8, 1971. http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,877395,00.html.

[65] In the obituary, Greenberg quotes from Mondrian's "Toward the True Vision of Reality," which discusses the place of painting and architecture within Mondrian's concept of Neo-Plasticism.

[66] It was not actually an "interview," but instead a "collage of letters" (as Yve-Alain Bois describes it) that Sweeney had collected from Mondrian while he was preparing a monograph on the artist. The "interview" was published in the 1948 MoMA exhibition catalogue *Piet Mondrian*. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Piet Mondrian, *New York City*," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990; 1998), 302n6.

[67] Pace Gallery in New York executed Mondrian's design for the *Salon de Madame B á Dresden* in 1970.

[68] Mondrian ultimately placed painting above architecture since he felt that painting was "the most consistent expression of pure relationships." Further, "In painting the dualities of

the interior of his studios as a Neo-Plastic environment/composition. This included the two Paris studios—5, rue du Coulmiers and 26, Rue du Départ—his London atelier, and his final studio, 15 E. Fifty-ninth Street in New York (fig. 2.3). He never painted directly on the walls, presumably because he was always in rental apartments. Further, the removable planes of color allowed him to continually rearrange his compositions. The studio often directly reflected what he was working on.

In 1921, when Theo van Doesburg visited Mondrian in Paris, he noted: "What Mondrian has done in his studio, with his colourful pieces of cardboard, is restricted to a single plane, which makes it a painting in two dimensions."[69] At the time of his interview with Sweeney, Mondrian had been experimenting with removable color and non-color planes in his New York studio where he had arranged rectangular cards of red, yellow, blue, gray and white, tacking them directly to off-white walls with small nails. These later became known as his "Wall Works" (1943–44).[70] When Mondrian died, his friend and greatest supporter, Harry Holztman, kept Mondrian's studio open to visitors for a month, documented the "Wall Works," photographed them in situ, and even filmed Mondrian's arrangement of furniture, easel, and paintings within his atelier. The photographs of Mondrian's Neo-Plastic environment have become as famous as Hans Namuth's that record Pollock's process. Transforming his studio into "art as environment" is just one of the ways in which Mondrian expanded painting into the "décor of the manmade world." Despite the fact that Pollock did not subscribe to Mondrian's aesthetic doctrine, he would create a similar kind of environment when his wall-sized paintings, specifically composed to cover almost every square inch of vertical

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relationship can be placed in juxtaposition to one another (on one plane), which is impossible in architecture or sculpture. Thus, painting can indeed be the most purely 'plastic.'" Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting," (1917), *The New Art—The New Life*, 29.

[69] Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction*, trans. Barbara Potter Fasting (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 144.

[70] Mondrian scholar Nancy Troy argues that the "Wall Works" are fragments of Mondrian's studio and should not be considered artworks because they underwent continual transformation. Nancy Troy, "To Be Continued: A Note on Some Recent Mondrians," *October* (Winter 1983): 74–80.

space in Betty Parsons gallery, and conveyed the same sense of painting integrated with architecture.

Greenberg also described Mondrian's paintings as "no longer windows in the wall but islands radiating clarity, harmony, and grandeur."[71] Here he is referring to Mondrian's use of flat, unmodulated rectangles of primary color as well as the all-over modular grid that Mondrian introduced to abolish any figure/ground opposition. The flat color and lack of illusionistic depth in his paintings encourage the color planes to correspond with the wall's planarity, but what radiates are the vertical and horizontal lines that Mondrian began to employ after 1914. They not only radiate but they initiate a centrifugal reading; that is, as Rosalind Krauss explains in her well-known discussion of grid paintings, the grids create a continuum that extends in the mind beyond the edges of the painting.[72] Greenberg understood this when he wrote that Mondrian's art "designates the farthest limit of easel painting. Those whose point of departure is where Mondrian left off will no longer be easel painters."[73] Pollock's post-1947 paintings also produce this "expansiveness of effect" so that when he debuted his 1947 drip/pour paintings at Parsons in November of that year, Greenberg proclaimed: "Since Mondrian no one has driven the easel picture quite so far away from itself," adding, "In this day and age the art of painting rejects the easel and yearns for the wall."[74]

Another way in which Mondrian—and soon Pollock—abandoned easel painting was by discarding the picture frame. The absence of frames allowed Mondrian to come closer to a hybrid environment of painting and architecture since the paintings would appear more congruent with the wall, giving the impression of an indivisible whole. Early on he wrote to a friend about his paintings: "without a frame they look best."[75] According to Mondrian scholar Nancy Troy, the artist "rarely used prominent frames because it

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[71] Greenberg, "Mondrian Obituary," 1944, *CEC*, vol. 1, 188.
[72] Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 8–22.
[73] Greenberg, "Mondrian Obituary," 1944, *CEC*, vol. 1, 187.
[74] Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Worden Day, Carl Holty, and Jackson Pollock," 1948, *CEC*, vol. 2, 201.
[75] Mondrian in Yve-Alain Bois, "The Iconoclast," in *Piet Mondrian,* ed. Angelica Rudenstine (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1994), 172.

would have set them too much apart from the walls on which they were hung."[76] Framing—or lack of—was a concern of many de Stijl artists. Van Doesburg, for example, criticized the use of frames in the 1920 issue of *de Stijl,* writing that frames "tend to emphasize the separate, individual character of easel paintings, reinforcing the viewer's sense of standing before a single object rather than in the extended space of the painted composition."[77] As Troy explains, van Doesburg (and this could apply to Mondrian as well) "favored an 'abstract, that is to say *frame-less* art of painting."[78] Pollock, Newman and Rothko, among other abstract expressionist painters, consciously chose not to frame their larger, mural-sized paintings as a way of creating more of an environment rather than setting up an artificial boundary between wall and canvas (more on this in their individual chapters). Frameless paintings may be the halfway point (as Greenberg and Pollock would come to describe Pollock's paintings) between the easel picture (small, portable, framed, commodity, often decorative) and the mural (painted directly on the wall, meant to be viewed from afar, contains narrative content or message) because a large, unframed, abstract painting is neither easel nor mural.

Paradoxically, while their paintings mimic the planarity of the wall, both Pollock's and Mondrian's can simultaneously appear object-like. While Mondrian was interested in uniting the planarity of his painting with the vertical wall to effect a utopian environment, this did not prevent him from treating his paintings as separate and individual objects. G.L.K. Morris described Mondrian's sub-framed paintings as "free objects . . . they remain the strongest examples yet of painting projected as sculpture." [79] His innovative method of framing contributed to this. Around 1920 he developed a sub-frame i.e. a wide platform fastened to the back of the painting's stretcher bars and hung

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[76] Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), 205.
[77] Theo van Doesburg, "Lijstenaesthetiek," *De Stijl III* (1920) in Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 30.
[78] The last exhibition Guggenheim held at Art of This Century before she closed her gallery was a retrospective of Van Doesburg's paintings and designs in May 1947. Greenberg reviewed the show and praised the artist and his "gift for painting." Greenberg also noted that van Doesburg had extended his and Mondrian's ideas into architecture and interior decoration. Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Theo van Doesburg and Robert Motherwell," *CEC*, vol. 2, 150–52.
[79] G.L.K. Morris, "Relations of Painting and Sculpture," *Partisan Review* (January–February 1943), in Bois, "Piet Mondrian, *New York City*," in *Painting as Model,* 170.

flush to the wall.[80] It resembles a ziggurat. This frame both supported and projected the painting away from the surface on which it was hung. In 1943, near the end of his life, Mondrian explained why he preferred the sub-frame, nearly echoing what Greenberg would write in the artist's obituary:

> So far as I know, I was the first to bring the painting forward from the frame, rather than set it within the frame. I had noted that a picture without a frame works better than a framed one, and that framing causes sensations of three dimensions. It gives an illusion of depth, so I took a frame of plain wood and mounted my picture on it. In this way I brought it to a more real existence . . . To move the painting into our surroundings and give it real existence has been my ideal since I came to abstract painting.[81]

Museums later installed Pollock's paintings as freestanding walls to encourage their reading as objects that, combined, created the effect of an environment. This includes the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome where several of his frieze-like paintings were suspended from the ceiling with invisible wires. They hovered within the galleries like free-floating panels, more like objects than paintings (fig. 2.4).[82] As James Elkins described the installation, "the curator hung the paintings as though they themselves were walls, free of the gallery walls, and one floated right through an open

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[80] In 1977, Joop P. Joosten devoted an article to Mondrian's frames in which he pointed out that Mondrian did not develop his "projecting" simple white frames until the 1920s. For *Composition with Colored Planes* (1917), Mondrian would have used a more traditional frame that extended around the edges of the canvas surface (protectively), delimiting the internal forms' sense of movement and creating tension between the individual painting and its immediate environment (not to mention the viewer). Joop P. Joosten, "Grenzen van Mondriaan," (1977), *Openbaar Kunstbezit* in Troy, *Environment*, 205n41.

[81] See James Johnson Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America," *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 13 (1946): 35–36.

[82] "Jackson Pollock 1912–1956," Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, March 1–30, 1958.

doorway."[83] When the exhibition traveled to London's Whitechapel Art Gallery that fall, the museum's director, Bryan Robertson, applied for special funds from the Arts Council of Great Britain so that he could hire an architect to build special freestanding walls upon which to hang Pollock's later paintings. He did this in order to stress the materiality of the paint, but the walls also served to emphasize the paintings' ability to act as walls themselves.

Mondrian's connection to Pollock manifested itself in a number of ways, for it was also Mondrian who first to supported and defended Pollock's work, ultimately persuading Peggy Guggenheim to include his *Stenographic Figure* (1942) in her 1943 "Spring Salon for Young Artists." Guggenheim had judged Pollock's submission "pretty awful,"[84] but Mondrian, while acknowledging that "Pollock points in the opposite direction of my painting," also felt that it "may be the most exciting painting I have seen in a long time, here or in Europe."[85] Guggenheim acquiesced, Pollock was included in the show, and thus began a four-year business relationship with the artist that would prove fraught, yet significant for both.

Frederick Kiesler: Guggenheim's "Art of This Century"—Modern Art in a Modern Setting

Frederick Kiesler plays an important role in the history of abstract expressionism, yet his influence is under recognized. It was Kiesler who introduced the postwar

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[83] James Elkins, "'Art and the Power of Placement': Getting the Hang of It," *New York Times*, May 8, 2005.

[84] As per Jimmy Ernst in Jacqueline Bograd Weld, *Peggy: The Wayward Guggenheim* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986), 305.

[85] Piet Mondrian in Carter Ratcliff, *The Fate of a Gesture* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), 53. According to Tony Smith, he and Pollock used to visit the various galleries that showed Mondrian's paintings. As he recalled, "Mondrian seemed to interest [Pollock]—especially in the works where the lines were not so rigid. He seemed to like the way Mondrian handled the surface in these early works. I've always felt there was some kind of similarity in the way both Mondrian and Pollock strove to keep the visual intensity of their works on the surface. The whole trend of painting in the twentieth century has been towards the surface, much in the way the dominant theme of the Renaissance was the exploration of space." Tony Smith in a draft of an undated (probably mid-1960s) interview with James Valliere, Tony Smith Estate Archives (hereafter cited as TSEA).

generation of artists to innovative ways of exhibiting their art that included his groundbreaking art installations in which he integrated the art object within its architectural setting. Kiesler also liberated paintings from their old-fashioned frames, removed them from their traditional setting on the wall, and extended them into the viewer's actual, physical space enabling the gallerygoer to walk among the art objects. Kiesler was a Viennese-trained architect in addition to artist and designer. He worked in Berlin and Paris where he befriended many of the major European avant-garde artists and architects, before coming to the United States in 1926 where he attained citizenship ten years later. Kiesler was a member of the De Stijl group, and frequently exchanged ideas with Mondrian and van Doesburg.[86] His innovative ideas and theories concerning the fluid relationship between art and object were somewhat aligned to the de Stijl notion of a "total environment" or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He believed that art objects should be integrated within their architectural environment rather than presented as autonomous objects lined up and displayed next to one another on the wall. He not only exhibited the art objects in innovative ways, but also often within unconventional architectural spaces.

Kiesler became a visible and welcome presence soon after his arrival in New York where he eventually came to know many of the abstract expressionists including Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, William Baziotes, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, and Ad Reinhardt.[87] He attended their informal gatherings held at the Eighth-Street Club, a loft for artists on Tenth Street, in the 1950s, where he later participated in "An Evening for Jackson Pollock," upon the artist's death in 1956. He joined them in their discussions at the Cedar Tavern where his pronouncements on the aesthetic issues of the day were "feisty, opinionated, articulate, and theatrical."[88] Kiesler also exhibited with many of these painters at Kootz Gallery's 1951 "The Muralist and the Modern Architect" and Dorothy Miller's "Fifteen Americans" at MoMA in 1952. In 1951 Philip Johnson

[86] Kiesler was also a member of the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen as well as Buckminster Fuller's Structural Studies Associates. He was also friendly with Marcel Duchamp and the exiled Parisian art community, and was deemed "official" architect of the Surrealists.
[87] Lisa Phillips, *Frederick Kiesler* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), 33.
[88] Ibid.

invited him to participate in MoMA's symposium on "How to Combine Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture."[89] His designs introduced many of the abstract expressionists to modern architecture and inspired new ways of thinking about exhibiting their work.

Kiesler came to New York at the request of Jane Heap, a co-publisher of the art and literary journal *The Little Review,* who wanted him to recreate a radical installation he had recently designed in Vienna. The "Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik"/"International Theater Exhibition" had been presented in a concert hall in which Kiesler arranged a system of rectangular red, black, and white freestanding wooden constructions upon which he affixed hundreds of unframed theater and set design drawings, plans, and posters by avant-garde European artists. By hanging the artworks upon these modular structures within the room rather than upon the wall, his design not only permitted more artworks to be viewed, but also created a maze like space throughout which viewers could wander and experience the artworks. Kiesler had worked in the theater on stage and set designs. One of his inventive contributions was to remove the stage, thus eliminating the boundary between the actors and audience and integrating the two.[90] Similarly with exhibition installations, he sought to instigate a closer connection between spectators and artworks, creating an environment somewhat like his theater productions. Kiesler had come to New York to organize an American version of the "Theater Exhibition."[91] It was soon followed by one of his most provocative projects, Peggy Guggenheim's museum-like gallery Art of This Century.

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[89] He also created a wooden sculpture, *Galaxy*, for Philip Johnson's Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut, where it was later struck down by lightning.

[90] Kiesler first did this in 1924 in Vienna when he constructed the *Raumbühne* [Space Stage] for the "Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik." He removed the proscenium so that actors participating in the festival could use it for their performances.

[91] Jane Heap of the *Little Review* helped Kiesler to organize the New York version of the "Theater Exhibition," which opened on West Fifty-seventh Street in the Steinway Building. It presented artists from sixteen countries and included theatrical designs by Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Francis Picabia, Fernand Leger, and Georges Braque, among others. It received wide press coverage and high attendance, and was considered a great success. Susan Delson, *Dudley Murphy: Hollywood Wild Card* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 59–60.

Guggenheim hired Kiesler in the spring of 1942 to design a space to house her rapidly growing modern art collection.[92] It was to act as both museum (to showcase Guggenheim's collection) and gallery (to present changing exhibitions), thus Kiesler divided the two contiguous Fifty-seventh Street lofts Guggenheim had rented into three separate spaces: the Surrealist, Abstract, and Daylight galleries. The gallery's press release announced the architect's stated desire to create "a new system of co-coordinating architecture with painting and sculpture and their coordination to the spectator."[93] Kiesler achieved this by arranging the paintings freely throughout the space using cantilever and suspension constructions rather than hanging the pictures flush against the wall.[94] In the Surrealist gallery he placed the paintings on "arms" that projected from curved walls so that they appeared to float in space. In the Abstract Gallery, the architect fastened the paintings to triangular suspension columns (which one journalist would liken to a clothes line).[95] In both situations, the paintings appeared as free-floating objects in space. In this way, Kiesler later explained, the picture "is separated from the background and brought closer to the spectator. The picture seems to float freely. It ceases to be a decoration on the wall and becomes a small solid island in space (which anticipates Greenberg's description of Mondrian's paintings as "islands radiating clarity, harmony, and grandeur" a year later in March 1944). It is a world in itself which the painter has conceived and the architect has anchored."[96]

Another feature of Kiesler's pioneering design involved the elimination of picture frames, which he felt were a distraction and disrupted the fluidity between the object and

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[92] They had met at a cocktail party hosted by Guggenheim in November 1941. Kiesler and his wife Steffi were invited at the suggestion of Jimmy Ernst.

[93] Frederick Kiesler, "Press Release Pertaining to the Architectural Aspects of the Gallery," n.d. (c. October 20, 1942) reproduced in *Peggy Guggenheim and Frederick Kiesler, The Story of Art of This Century*, 176–77.

[94] This is known as the "Träger" and "Leger" system and is basically what Kiesler had employed in Vienna.

[95] A.Z. Kruse, "At the Art Galleries: Art of This Century Presented in Novel Way by Peggy Guggenheim," *Brooklyn Eagle*, October 25, 1942, in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 281.

[96] Kiesler in Dieter Bogner, "Staging Works of Art: Frederick Kiesler's Exhibition Design 1924–1957," in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 36.

the spectator's viewing experience.[97] He later noted: "The frame was suppressed and painting liberated. The removed frame was replaced with another. That is: the *general architecture of the room*."[98] Don Quaintance believes that AoTC's frameless painting policy inspired a number of AoTC artists to adopt this practice including Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still. He believes that their large canvases, in conjunction with Kiesler's hanging systems, "redefined the traditional role of the wall itself" and that "the showing of unframed canvases became standard practice."[99] The fact that the paintings were unframed was mentioned in almost every review of the gallery's debut. For instance, "We find all of the art framed not within an individual rectangle or square of its own, but instead by the 'spatial' architecture that forms the whole gallery and of which the painting is definitely a part."[100]

Kiesler sought to eliminate the boundary between the space within which the viewer stood and that within the painting as well as the architecture of the room, thus creating a more cohesive whole. This notion coincided with his theory of what he called Correalism, which he described as the continuity of or contiguous movement in space. Basically it meant a greater interaction between a person and their environment. He developed his concept of Correalism further in his "endless architecture," an architecture defined by straight lines, solid planes, and unbounded by angles. The goal was to integrate the architecture within the space of human movement.[101]

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[97] Technically speaking, the paintings exhibited at Art of This Century did have strip wooden lathe frames, and, in a few cases, flat metal frames that were used to cover up holes or nail heads within the tacking edges. These bands of wood, metal, or tape were unobtrusive. Kiesler was referring to the elimination of heavy, ornate frames. As noted in the gallery's press release, "Mr. Kiesler has executed his ideas and plans in an entirely new way of presenting paintings and sculptures. The paintings, for example, will be shown without frames and appear to be suspended in midair." "Press Release, Peggy Guggenheim to Open Art Gallery 'Art of This Century,'" n.d. (c. October 20, 1942) reproduced in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 179.

[98] Kiesler, "Manifesto on Correalism," (June 1949), in Don Quaintance, "Modern Art in a Modern Setting: Frederick Kiesler's Design of Art of This Century," in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 211 (italics in the original).

[99] Quaintance, "Modern Art in a Modern Setting," in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 211–12.

[100] E.A. Jewell, "Gallery Premiere Assists Red Cross," *New York Times,* October 21, 1942, in *The Story of Art of This Century,* 280.

[101] In 1925 *De Stijl* published Kiesler's manifesto, "No More Walls," a declaration that foreshadowed the development of his *Endless House Project*, begun in the 1930s but never

When Art of This Century opened in October 1942, Guggenheim issued a press release announcing the gallery's inauguration and Kiesler issued two press releases—one technical, the other theoretical—that focused specifically on the gallery's design. The art world arrived full of curiosity. Nothing quite like it had ever been seen before in New York. In the 1940s, most art galleries were designed and outfitted as bourgeois living rooms with wood wainscoting, carpeted floors, potted plants, and overstuffed sofas. The paintings were framed in gold and hung traditionally upon the walls. The response to Kiesler's design and installation was largely positive. This includes Greenberg who felt that the "décor . . . provides a sense of relief from other usually over-upholstered or over-sanitary museums and galleries."[102]

Art of This Century soon became a meeting place for artists, collectors, and intellectuals, "a magnet for the avant-garde" with young artists barely out of high school coming in from the suburbs to experience Kiesler's design and presentation.[103] It's difficult to know how Pollock felt about Kiesler's design and/or theories for exhibiting art as we have no record of his response to the gallery's layout and construction. Pollock exhibited at Art of This Century on four occasions, but never in the Surrealist or Abstract galleries, which were geared more for smaller Surrealist works and European modernist paintings rather than the increasingly larger abstract expressionist canvases. Instead, Pollock showed in the Daylight Gallery, a simple, rectilinear, white-walled box that featured changing exhibitions including the annual salon of young artists. Although the Daylight Gallery's architectural design was more conservative than the Surrealist and Abstract Galleries, it was the temporary exhibitions shown there that proved more cutting-edge. It also set a precedent for the more simplified, "white-cube" galleries of the 1960s. By 1945, American artists were dominating the gallery's activities and many of them would show at Art of This Century, including Rothko, Motherwell, and Clyfford

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actually realized. In 1958, Arthur Drexler managed to raise $12,000 for Kiesler to draft construction plans, and in 1960 the Museum of Modern Art, New York, exhibited a model of the *Endless House*.

[102] Greenberg, "Review of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection," 1943, *CEC*, vol. 1, 141.

[103] Susan Davidson, "Focusing an Instinct: The Collecting of Peggy Guggenheim," in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 75.

Still. Kiesler's architecture and exhibition design were so radical that they cannot have helped but had an impact on Pollock as well as the other abstract expressionists who were coming to the fore. His installation design would also have an effect on Parsons and Sidney Janis whose galleries were far simpler in layout and less radical in design, but they exhibited the new paintings without frames. Kiesler went on to design other exhibitions, including "Bloodflames" at the Hugo Gallery in 1947. Here, too, "The pictures (and people) were framed by spaces instead of lengths of wood . . . by space and shapes of surfaces instead of by a borrowed showy sumptuousness of golden and pitiful bare wooden frames."[104] He exhibited many of the paintings on the floor, propped up against the wall as if they were still in the artist's studio. One painting, Alfredo Lam's *The Eternal Presence* (1945) he actually affixed flat on the ceiling (the viewer was offered a Correalist chair on which they could recline and gaze up at the painting). This is somewhat akin to what Janis would do in 1955 when he installed Pollock's *White Cockatoo Number 24A* (1948) on the gallery's ceiling—an unusual placement for a painting in an ordinarily staid exhibition environment (fig. 2.5). But Janis's motive had less to do with gallery design and was more in keeping with his sense of humor. If one looks carefully, it's possible to discern a white bird in the center of the painting, which Janis thought would be amusing to have alighted above the artist's exhibition.[105]

An Impractical Size

On the heels of Guggenheim's *Mural* (1943-44), Pollock continued to make large-scale abstract paintings that stretched beyond six feet and often up to eight feet. These canvases include the six-foot wide *Night Mist* (1944-45), the eight-and-a-half-foot *There*

[104] Frederick Kiesler, "Economy and Exuberance," 1947, in Bogner, "Staging Works of Art," in *The Story of Art of This Century*, 37.

[105] According to Rosalind Krauss, Janis installed the painting on the ceiling because his gallery could not accommodate all of the large works (*Cockatoo* measures nine and a half feet in width). At first, she says, Pollock and Krasner were taken aback, and then amused. T.J. Clark can find no evidence of this and thinks that Pollock participated in hanging the painting on the ceiling. See Krauss, "Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 234; T.J. Clark, "The Unhappy Consciousness," in *Farewell to An Idea, Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 439n72.

Were Seven in Eight (c. 1945), and *Troubled Queen* (c. 1945) that reaches over six feet in height. One might assume that Pollock's departure in 1945 from the cramped confines of New York City to the open space of Long Island where he settled into a larger studio encouraged the realization of such enormous works. But when he and Krasner moved to the Springs, Pollock first worked in a small upstairs bedroom that measured roughly 121-square feet.[106] There he produced over the summer of 1946 the Accabonac Creek series, which includes two seven-foot paintings *The Key* and *The Water Bull*. Later that year, when he was able to move into a larger studio independent of the house, he completed The Sounds in the Grass series, which, surprisingly, are smaller than his previous set of paintings: *Croaking Movement* and *Eyes in the Heat* both measure about 54 by 44 inches; *Shimmering Substance* 30 1/8 x 24 ¼ inches**.**[107] The studio, actually a refurbished barn, measured twenty-one feet square and was, as Kirk Varnedoe described it, "more of a glorified tool shed within which Pollock's paintings could barely fit."[108]

When Barbara Rose questioned Krasner as to whether or not Pollock's move to the barn from the bedroom studio could account for the more dramatic increase in the size and scale of his paintings of the late 1940s and early 1950s, she replied, "Surely, since his 1950 show had some big paintings [*One: Number 31, 1950; Autumn Rhythm; Lavender Mist*; *Number 32, 1950; Number 28, 1950*]." But she also acknowledged that: "Pollock had a lot more space on Eighth Street. He wasn't confined to one tiny little room. I think the increase in size has more to do with the fundamental aspects of why he

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[106] The bedroom studio measures twelve feet, eight inches by nine feet, five inches. I thank Helen Harrison, Director of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, for providing me with this information.

[107] Helen Harrison believes that Pollock also painted *The Blue Unconscious*, a seven-foot canvas from the *Sounds in the Grass* series, in the bedroom "studio." Helen Harrison, email message to the author, May 29, 2009.

[108] Francis O'Connor has noted that if you take into consideration the worktables and stacked paintings around the periphery, the barn studio had about the same amount of floor area as Pollock's old Eighth Street studio, which was eighteen feet square. The only difference was in height, which could have affected Pollock psychically, but not physically since he painted the larger canvases on the floor. O'Connor in *Such Desperate Joy,* 187. Jeanne Siegel has noted that the reason that the Museum of Modern Art included a "model" barn in the 1999 Pollock retrospective was to impress upon viewers the limited space in which the artist made the paintings. Jeanne Siegel, "Materiality Is the Message," *Art Journal* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 110.

did what he did."[109] It should be noted that it was, in fact, in the small Eighth Street apartment Pollock shared with his brother and sister-in-law that he completed Guggenheim's *Mural*. He did, however, have to break through a wall in order to accommodate the painting's nine-by-twenty foot stretcher.[110] As Pollock later explained when asked about the dimensions of his paintings, "They're an impractical size—9 x 18 feet. But I enjoy working big and—whenever I have a chance, I do it whether it's practical or not."[111]

Size Versus Scale

Here it is important to differentiate between size and scale. Scale is often used as a synonym for size when discussing abstract expressionist painting. While they are not synonymous, they are closely related. Size concerns a painting's physical dimension. As E.C. Goossen explained in 1958 in one of the first essays dedicated to what he described as "a peculiar phenomenon of our period . . . the Big Canvas":

> By the Big Canvas I mean something actual, in physical size; a canvas whose footage in both directions is larger than the comprehensive image the eye is capable of taking in from the customary distance. The customary distance is that normally and previously satisfactory for a complete view of the average easel painting, prior to the increase of this average in the past ten years.[112]

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[109] Barbara Rose, "Jackson Pollock at Work: An Interview with Lee Krasner," *Partisan Review* 47, no. 1 (1980): 83–84.

[110] With some artists, the size of their studios either accounted for enlarged paintings or a sizable studio was sought in anticipation of producing monumental paintings. For example, in the late 1950s when Milton Resnick emptied his Tenth Street studio of paintings, placing them all in storage, he was left with a ten-by-fifteen-foot wall. He decided to "paint a picture that big." Milton Resnick in Geoffrey Dorfman, *Out of the Picture: Milton Resnick and the New York School* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2003), 14.

[111] Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," 1950, *JPIAR*, 22.

[112] E.C. Goossen, "The Big Canvas," *Art International* 2, no. 8 (November 1958): 45–47. T.J. Clark also makes clear that size and scale are two different things, but argues that Pollock is a

Size is what contributed to the enveloping effect of Pollock's canvases, but so does scale. Scale, described by Frank O'Hara as "that mysterious and ambiguous quality in art which elsewhere is a simple designation," was of primary importance to many of the artists, especially Pollock, and, as we shall see, Newman and Rothko.[113] Scale differs from size in that it pertains to proportion i.e. the viewer's physical relationship to the canvas. As a result, it is a *felt* thing. Lucy Lippard made this distinction in her discussion of Minimalist sculpture, an argument that closely aligns with a manifestation of many of the abstract expressionists' paintings. She noted that most discussions of scale consider it a strictly optical effect, but scale cannot be communicated through a photograph or by description. Instead, it must be experienced. Ben Heller conveys this in his recollection of visiting Rothko's studio in 1954. The room was small, and the paintings large: "They so filled the space that you had no room . . . I could not wander. I felt then what I later learned: that Rothkos, Pollocks, Newmans, and Stills were all painted and conceived in relatively small spaces, that their scale was between man and painting, that the relationship between the physical size of the work and the viewer was crucial."[114]

Lippard equated this type of experience with what she describes as a "sense of place" i.e. the "sculptor's sense of scale is to be communicated as a 'sense of place.'" By sense of place she means that a work is strong enough to dominate its space or environment, or has such an impact that it makes of the spectator no longer a passive viewer, but a participatory, actively engaged audience. This occurs more often with horizontal works rather than vertical where the viewer is forced to take it in by parts and over time. An example of this might be Robert Morris' project for an "endless" mound wall in the desert or plains that can only be seen at once from above in an airplane. Or perhaps the Ohio Indian Mounds that Newman visited in 1949, which conveyed to him

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painter of size, not scale. "Size," he writes, "is literal." T.J. Clark, "Pollock's Smallness," *New Approaches*, 15.

[113] Frank O'Hara, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), 28.

[114] Ben Heller, "Reminiscences of a Passionate Collector," in *Mark Rothko* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 179.

what he would later describe as "a sense of place."[115] Lippard cites Morris' project as "the sculptural equivalent of Pollock's all-over esthetic, the endless surface, and structures that continue or envelop rather than insisting on themselves as isolated forms."[116]

Between the Easel and the Mural: "A Halfway State"

The summer of 1947 proved a turning point for Pollock. That August he wrote to his friend and fellow-artist Louis Bunce, "I'm just now getting into painting again and the stuff is really beginning to flow, a grand feeling when it happens."[117] Pollock was referring to what are now known as his "classic" drip/pour paintings and "the stuff" ultimately produced a total of seventeen paintings for his first show with Betty Parsons Gallery opening that January 5, 1948. Of those, not only did *Alchemy*, *Cathedral*, and *Lucifer* feature his new "allover" drip style, but they were also the largest canvases he had produced since *Mural*. These paintings, however, were not created with an architectural destination in mind that would have predetermined or governed their size. Instead, as Krasner pointed out, the increased size had to do with the "fundamental aspects of why he did what he did."[118] The size of these canvases enabled the artist to work out formal and conceptual issues that he had only begun to approach with *Mural*. And as Pollock required an increasingly greater expanse of surface on which to develop his ideas, these paintings began to take on size and scale, and also acquired a material density and object nature that would resemble the vertical architectural surface on which they were installed. The drip/pour paintings also involved an entirely new approach to the very act of creating them—Pollock worked on them horizontally on the floor. As he stated that fall in *Possibilities*, a journal launched by Robert Motherwell, "My painting

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[115] Barnett Newman, "Interview with Sylvester," 1965, in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990; 1992), 257 (hereafter cited as *SWI*).
[116] Lucy Lippard, "Escalation in Washington," *Art International* 12, no. 1 (January 1968): 45.
[117] Jackson Pollock in letter to Louis Bunce, postmarked August 29, 1947, Louis Bunce Papers, AAA.
[118] Krasner in "Jackson Pollock at Work," 83–84.

does not come from the easel."[119] But once they took their vertical stance, they changed character. As Varnedoe notes, with the 1947 paintings, Pollock not only reinvented painting as a different kind of activity, but also as an *object.*[120]

Pollock's unconventional technique necessitated relatively quick-drying paints with a fluid viscosity. He found these qualities in the new synthetic, resin-based paints that Siqueiros' Experimental Workshop introduced him to in the late 1930s. These paints were invented for industrial purposes such as spray-painting cars or household interior decorating.[121] Pollock described his use of modern household and industrial paints, rather than artist's paints, as "a natural growth out of a need." One of such paints was Duco, which Pollock would cast, pour, and attentively direct on to unprimed cotton duck canvas.[122] As an automobile finish, Duco was prized for its durability—it would not chip, crack, or fade.[123] It was thick and quick drying. On the canvas it appears impenetrable.[124] An inability to see beyond the canvas's surface (i.e. into a fictive space) increases the viewer's sense of the work's dense materiality or physicality, especially because the webs of poured paint most obviously reside on the canvas's very surface severely limiting (or even obliterating) any recessional space.[125]

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[119] Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* (Winter 1947–48), reprinted *JPIAR*, 17–18.
[120] Kirk Varnedoe, *Pollock*, 1998, 48 (italics mine).
[121] Synthetic paints had begun replacing traditional oil-based paints in the 1930s. Gloss enamel paints became more readily available and less expensive than artist's oils, especially during the Second World War.
[122] Even the canvas that Pollock used was industrially produced. He purchased the fabric from John Boyle & Co., a manufacturer of awnings, tents, and heavy-duty sails for marine use. A 1910 advertisement described the durability of their material as "canvas you can walk on," which Pollock occasionally did.
[123] Traditional varnishes chipped, cracked, and faded; Duco lacquer was almost invincible. It tolerated air, sun, rain, mud, dampness, heat, cold, salt water, bacteria, perspiration, dirt, soaps, and detergents. Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "True Blue: DuPont and the Color Revolution," *Chemical Heritage Magazine* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2007). http://www.chemheritage.org/pubs/ch-v25n3-articles/feature_duco_p3.html
[124] Duco was a trade name of the industrial paint manufacturer DuPont. It was originally used as an automotive finish by General Motors Corporation. Duco lacquer revolutionized the automotive finish business by reducing finish time from two weeks to two days. It was thick and quick-drying. It was also used by homeowners who wanted to update their homes for little money.
[125] As Richard Shiff notes, all paintings possess materiality, although the first immediate physical sensation that a painting generates is visual. He argues that "such opticality is not inconsistent with the materiality of paint and canvas, nor does it prevent a viewer from relating to how the

With the "poured" paintings, Pollock also began using a heat-resistant industrial silver paint that was developed and manufactured for sealing steam radiators.[126] While the silver can enliven the surface of his paintings with its metallic sheen (depending upon the lighting), it, too, possesses an opacity that makes it virtually impossible to visually penetrate. *Cathedral* (1947) is thought to be the first of the aluminum pictures and both *Alchemy* and *Lucifer* also present good examples of this occurrence (fig. 2.6). Further, the very colors that Pollock chose to use, taking *Lucifer* and *Alchemy*, again, as examples— coal black, sienna brown, silver/gray, dark green— tend to make the dense network of linear skeins sit on the surface rather than pull back into recessionary space. The opacity is heightened by the thick application of paint. While in some instances he diluted the paint to the point where it created little textural effect, at others it is thick enough to cast shadows. The crisscrossing ebb and flow of the various paint materials, one layer residing on top of one another, gives the canvas a degree of tactility that makes it almost less painting and more object. So far had Pollock ventured from the traditional concept of an easel painting, that at one point, having finished *Lucifer*, he called Krasner into his studio to ask, "Is this a painting?"[127] As Elizabeth Frank notes, "Pollock's encrusted, puddle, labyrinthine, and web-like surfaces are physically present, and entice the viewer into a relationship in which his own body, and not just his eyesight, directly confronts the abstract field. This relationship is close to the experience of architecture. There's a physical quality to the paintings."[128]

Since the drip/pour paintings often appear to have no up or no down, their orientation appears ambiguous. On a number of occasions—even during Pollock's lifetime—a horizontal painting could be shown vertically, and vice versa. As T.J. Clark

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work has been made and the physical effort of the artist." This is "What Greenberg might have called the *tangible datum* of seeing." Richard Shiff, *Doubt* (London: Routledge, 2007), 60.

[126] O'Connor believes that Pollock's inspiration for using metallic silver paint came from his familiarity with Jiddu Krishnamurti book covers that were typically decorated in allover patterns of metallic silver and gold inks. Pollock attended meetings in the late 1920s. O'Connor, *Such Desperate Joy,* 188.

[127] B.H. Friedman, "An Interview with Lee Krasner Pollock," in *Jackson Pollock: Black and White* (New York: Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, 1969), 7–10.

[128] Elizabeth Frank, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 72.

observes about the horizontal *Untitled Number 27* shown as a vertical painting: "At the level of architecture I am sure Pollock's paintings were meant to be pragmatic objects adaptable to contingencies."[129]

In the fall of 1947, Howard Myers, the editor and publisher of *Architectural Forum* and a major exponent of modern architecture, provided Pollock with application instructions for a Guggenheim fellowship.[130] Most scholars have thought that it was Greenberg alone who persuaded Pollock to apply for the fellowship, or that his longtime friend, Philip Guston, who had been awarded a Guggenheim the year before, had prompted Pollock's application.[131] But Myers, who eagerly championed fresh talent, was also a driving force. Myers was also known for bringing creative people together and he used *Architectural Forum,* one of the most respected and influential architecture publications of its time, as a platform to showcase trends in postwar architecture.[132] He also used the magazine to promote contemporary interiors. According to design historian Arthur Pulos, "Myers was convinced that the modern buildings that were beginning to appear on more and more drawing boards ought to have modern furnishings."[133] He introduced Florence and Hans Knoll, two of the most influential designers of the post-war period, to many of their clients and was responsible for the collaborations they embarked upon with Eero Saarinen, Isamu Noguchi, and Mies van der Rohe. In the late 1940s, Knoll catalogues advertised their products accompanied by Pollock's paintings—modern furniture and modern paintings completed the modern home (fig. 2.7). Myers obviously supported Pollock's new paintings, and one can only imagine the range of collaborations

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[129] Clark, "Pollock's Smallness," *New Approaches*, 25.

[130] "Hope this gives you the necessary information on Guggenheim Fellowships. Let me know if there is anything further I can do about it." Howard Myers in letter to Jackson Pollock, September 15, 1947, Jackson Pollock/Lee Krasner Papers, AAA.

[131] At the time, Philip Guston was known for his work as a muralist and for the abstract scenes of American life he had completed while working for the WPA. In 1945–46, the year he applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship, he had completed *If This Be Not I* in addition to a series of paintings of children: *Night Children* (1945), *Somersault I* (1945), *Somersault II* (1946), and *Porch I* (1946).

[132] It was Myers who commissioned Mies van der Rohe to design his "Museum for a Small City" for the May 1943 issue of *Architectural Forum*, "New Buildings for 194X."

[133] Arthur J. Pulos, *The American Design Adventure, 1940–1975* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), 84.

between the artist and modern architects that he could have initiated had he not died just three days after sending the artist the Guggenheim information.[134] It is possible that he had already initiated connections; Pollock had written to his mother earlier that month (in the midst of working on *Alchemy*): "We have had a very busy summer—and have made some very good contacts—especially modern architects, and their response to my painting has been the unexpected."[135]

In October 1947, Pollock submitted his application for a Guggenheim Fellowship. He had already completed the first of his large-scale canvases to fully exhibit his drip/pour technique—*Alchemy, Cathedral,* and *Lucifer*—and was probably working on others as he considered his application statement. In his statement, Pollock affirmed his intention to continue this trend, and described they type of paintings he planned on making as "large moveable pictures which will function between the easel and the mural," noting, "I have set a precedent in this genre in a large painting for Miss Peggy Guggenheim." Further:

> I believe the time is not yet ripe for a <u>full</u> transition from easel to mural. The pictures I contemplate painting would constitute a halfway state, and an attempt to point out the direction of the future, without arriving there completely.[136]

Greenberg probably informed the wording. He had recently written that Pollock "points a way beyond the easel . . . to the mural, perhaps—or perhaps not. I cannot tell."[137] In his application statement, Pollock maintains Greenberg's sense of ambiguity: "pictures which will function *between* the easel and the mural . . . *not yet* a full transition . . . a *halfway* state . . . [that] point out the direction of the future, *without arriving there*

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[134] Unsigned. "Howard Myers, 52, Housing Authority, 'Architectural Forum' Publisher, A Leader in Prefabricated Building Industry, Dies," *New York Times*, September 20, 1947.
[135] Letter from Pollock to his mother, Stella, September 3, 1947, in *JPCR*, 4:240.
[136] Pollock, "Guggenheim Fellowship Statement," *JPCR*, 4:238 (emphasis in the original).
[137] Greenberg, "Reviews of Exhibitions of Jean Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock," 1947, *CEC*, vol. 2, 122–25.

completely." Francis Frascina suggests that Pollock understood that the middle class market was not yet ready to give up a traditional consumable commodity—the small-scale, precious object, easel painting, which is why he states "the time is not yet ripe for a full transition from easel to mural."[138] It's difficult to say exactly what Greenberg had in mind and why he remained vague (which was unusual given his tendency to make bold and definitive observations and pronouncements). His musings suggest that in Pollock's paintings he perceived a developmental or evolving character; a sense of historicism or inevitability. As Michael Fried points out, historicist tendencies associated with Hegel crept into Greenberg's neo-Kantian account of modernism.[139]

It could also be that Greenberg and Pollock recognized that both easel and mural paintings were more traditional forms of painting. And that abstract expressionism (a form of modern painting) could no longer be constricted within an easel format in order to achieve a high degree of flatness. As Greenberg later explained: "Abstract painting being flat needs a greater extension of surface on which to develop its ideas. It's trivial when confined to less than two feet."[140]

What is certain is that Guggenheim's *Mural* paved the way for a transition in Pollock's artistic development, and that his drip/pour paintings were foremost in mind when he completed the fellowship application. Thus one can conclude that the more recent paintings constituted "paintings halfway between the easel and the mural." What, in his mind, might constitute "halfway" paintings? Their overall dimensions are notably large; they are wholly abstract and painted on the floor rather than tacked to the wall (and certainly not on an easel); they are composed largely of industrial paints applied thickly with unconventional means such as dried out brushes, sticks, and basters on a heavy-duty canvas, which ultimately lends the painting a tactile physicality; the paintings were left

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[138] Francis Frascina, "Introduction," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (London: Routledge, 1985; 2000), 124. Krauss claims that it was Siqueiros who made the connection in Pollock's mind between easel painting as an elitist medium and the floor as locus of practice that would defeat that medium. Rosalind Krauss, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," *New Approaches*, 155–79.

[139] Michael Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 18.

[140] Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, *CEC,* vol. 2, 195.

unframed. Each of these details combined to produce a painting neither mural nor easel, but something else hard to define. As he concluded in his application, "I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is towards the wall picture or mural."[141]

Walls and *Wall*paper: Confusion Amongst Critics

When Peggy Guggenheim closed Art of This Century and left for Venice in the spring of 1947, Betty Parsons took over Pollock's contract and gave him his first show in her gallery in January 1948. Parsons's space, as Tony Smith recalled, was completely unlike the more typical galleries in New York at that time, which generally followed the European custom of imitating a bourgeois interior. This included wall-to-wall carpeting and framed paintings offered as decorative objects. Comparatively, Parsons's gallery was rather austere. It consisted of a windowless room with pale grey walls and a bare wood floor scrubbed once or twice a week. According to Smith, "Betty's was the first to have the appearance of an artist's studio or contemporary loft. White, absolutely bare, no decoration." And while most galleries, he claimed, were long and narrow, Parsons's had what Smith thought were "marvelous proportions."[142] Since the main room measured approximately twenty-by-thirty feet, and its ceilings were almost ten feet tall, artists could readily install an eighteen-foot painting. In fact, in the early 1950s, when Pollock indicated that he was considering leaving her gallery, Parsons reminded him: "I am the only gallery that can show big pictures related to murals."[143] Lee Hall, Parsons's biographer and friend for many years, claimed that from the beginning, Parsons had intended to show the work of artists in her E. Fifty-seventh Street gallery who renounced

[141] Pollock did not receive the fellowship. Instead, that year it went to Sue Fuller, a printmaker whose work was informed by Constructivism, Naum Gabo, and Antoine Pevsner; the Bolivian artist Alejandro Mario Illanes, whose work was inspired by his pre-Columbian heritage; Denny Winters, who relocated to Maine in 1950 and painted the local landscape; and Reuben Tam, an American landscape painter, educator, and graphic artist born in Hawaii.
[142] Tony Smith, interview by Calvin Tomkins, October 9, 1974, Calvin Tomkins Papers, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, 2.
[143] Betty Parsons in letter to Jackson Pollock, June 25, 1950, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.

easel painting in favor of "paintings the size of walls in ordinary houses."[144] Soon, in fact, the paintings would be equated with walls.

The majority of canvases that Pollock included in his 1948 Parsons exhibition consisted of the new drip/pour paintings he had begun the previous summer. With his earlier work, reviewers had remarked upon what they perceived as violence, his color (or lack thereof), their ugliness, spontaneity, dynamism, surface quality, and alloverness. But these more recent paintings provoked an additional response. A reviewer for *Art News* claimed that some of the paintings were so built up that they "extended into three dimensions."[145] Another noted that Pollock's painting procedure, in addition to his lavish use of paint, resulted in what he described as not a painting, but a "panel."[146] And when later asked about Pollock's 1948 show, Parsons first commented on the size of his canvases ("large, expansive paintings"), but added, "He exploded the easel painting, the wall painting. His paintings *were* walls."[147] Greenberg, too, in assessing this exhibition noted: "In this day and age the art of painting increasingly rejects the easel and yearns for the wall."[148] At this time, Greenberg was concretizing a framework within which he situated his concept of modernism on which he based his art writing. He asserted that a modernist painting use its own self critical means to define itself: the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment—all the elements previously denied by traditional painting were to be reasserted by modernist painting in order to exclude references to other mediums and maintain its "purity." Abstract painting, he believed, should embrace flatness since it is a property exclusive to that medium. In his assessment

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[144] Lee Hall, *Betty Parsons: Artist, Dealer, Collector* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 77.
[145] "Reviews and Previews: Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 46, no. 12 (February 1948): 58–59.
[146] A[lonzo] L[ansford], "Fifty-Seventh Street in Review: Automatic Pollock," *The Art Digest* 22, no. 8 (January 15, 1948): 19.
[147] Parsons on Pollock's 1948 exhibition at her gallery in Hall, *Parsons*, 90 (italics in the original). Parsons added to this comment that Pollock's paintings were "exploding worlds." As she later explained to Calvin Tomkins, an "expanding" or "exploding" world involved "things that project outside the canvas rather than back into it. Now it's become impossible to expand any more, and I think artists will begin exploring their inner worlds—that's the future." Betty Parsons interview by Calvin Tomkins, September 11, 1977, Calvin Tomkins Papers, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
[148] Greenberg, "Art," 1948, *CEC,* vol. 2, 107–108.

of American painting and sculpture, Greenberg had earlier remarked "Pollock's strength lies in the emphatic surfaces of his pictures, which it is his concern to maintain and intensify in all that thick, fuliginous flatness."[149] The flatter, the better, which in turn required a greater expanse of surface. As Pollock's paintings engaged with two-dimensional flatness, they moved closer toward the architectural environment in which they were installed. But as Pollock's paintings began to correlate more closely with the wall, they could produce an unintended result. As Greenberg also acknowledged in his review of Pollock's 1948 show at Parsons: "I already hear: 'wallpaper patterns.'"[150]

Aldous Huxley, one of fifteen "distinguished critics and connoisseurs" recruited to help make sense of mid-century modern American art, had already identified one of Pollock's drip/pour canvases as a wall covering. In *Life* magazine's now well-known 1948 "Round Table on Modern Art," he claimed that Pollock's *Cathedral* "seems to me like a panel for a wallpaper which is repeated indefinitely around the wall."[151] Something similar had been said about Guggenheim's *Mural*, as Greenberg recalled: "People said it just went on and on like glorified wallpaper."[152] One of the most famous conflations of "wallpaper" and abstract expressionist painting comes from Harold Rosenberg in his now canonical "The American Action Painters."[153] Although Rosenberg's interpretation of Abstract Expressionism was diametrically opposed to Greenberg's formalist approach, he, too, recognized that it could be identified with what he described as "apocalyptic

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[149] Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," 1947, *CEC,* vol. 2, 166.
[150] Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Day, Holty, Pollock," 1948, *CEC,* vol. 2, 201.
[151] Huxley was a curious choice for such a panel in that a childhood illness left him with exceedingly poor eyesight for the rest of his life. Beyond Huxley's observations, there were also comparisons to textiles by members of the *Life* panel. Theodore Greene of Yale University suggested that *Cathedral*'s composition would make for a good necktie and Sir Leigh Ashton of the Victoria and Albert Museum noted that "it would make a most enchanting printed silk." Ironically, Pollock had decorated ties (as well as lipsticks) after his employment was terminated on the WPA program in early 1943. This lasted until he took a custodial job at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. "A *Life* Round Table on Modern Art," *Life* (October 11, 1948): 58–70, 75–79.
[152] Greenberg in Solomon, *Pollock*, 153.
[153] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," 1952, reprinted in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 189–98.

wallpaper."[154] He does not specifically single out Pollock, but uses the term to categorize what he perceives as banal, weak, easy, without-risk painting.

"Wallpaper" implied "decorative," which for many postwar artists as well as critics connoted meaningless, mindless, non-art that lacked real content and was designed and painted only to amuse. Witness the anonymous *Art News* reviewer sent to cover Pollock's 1948 exhibition at Parsons (where Greenberg anticipated comparisons to wallpaper patterns) who wrote, "the work is lightweight . . . monotonous."[155] Or Belle Krasne on Pollock's 1950 show, which included three paintings that some critics feel represent the high point of Pollock's career (*One Number 31, 1950*, *Number 32, 1950*, and *Autumn Rhythm*): "Those who go for the no-intellectual-strings-attached sort of decoration will go for this year's Jackson Pollock show, his richest and most exciting to date."[156]

Decorative was a recurring and thorny issue for postwar advanced artists and is worth attending to briefly since it is rarely addressed.[157] In discussing Pollock's paintings in particular and abstract expressionist painting in general, decorative meant different things to different people. According to Rosalind Krauss, Pollock's greatest fear was that "he may be making *mere* abstraction, abstraction uninformed by a subject, contentless abstraction, for which the term—wholly pejorative for everyone from Kandinsky and Mondrian to Pollock and Newman—is *decoration.*"[158] Indeed, Barnett Newman argued in his 1945 essay, "The Plasmic Image," that the "[new painter] feels " that he is on the threshold of a new time, when the plastic or decorative aspects of his art must be

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[154] Ibid., 195.
[155] "Reviews and Previews: Jackson Pollock," 58–59.
[156] B[elle] K[rasne], "Jackson Pollock," *Art Digest* 25, no. 5 (December 1, 1950): 16.
[157] Ann Gibson recently pointed out that the abstract expressionists' disdain for the decorative is a midcentury assumption still at issue. See Gibson, "African American Contributions to Abstract Expressionism," In *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, 225. Christine Mehring also asserts that "A comprehensive treatment of the complex relation between the development of abstract painting and decoration remains to be written." Christine Mehring, *Blinky Palermo, Abstraction of an Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 132.
[158] Krauss, "Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly," 237 (italics in the original).

transcended so that the painter can project some concept."[159] Robert Storr believes that Pollock and his contemporaries were all contemptuous of the decorative in their art because they did not want their work to function as ornament. In order to avoid this, artists felt compelled "to control the circumstances in which paintings found themselves, to make paintings for a place in which they were the raison d'être rather than the backdrop."[160] This did not always happen and Pollock's paintings were, literally, used as backdrops.

The fact that viewers associated the paintings with wall coverings testifies to the ability of Pollock's canvases to resemble walls (or occasionally panels) rather than traditional easel or mural paintings. Some people made good use of this fact. In December 1950, when Pollock debuted the triumvirate *One Number 31, 1950*, *Number 32, 1950*, and *Autumn Rhythm*, he exhibited the paintings attached to the face of their stretchers in such a way that the entire extent of each canvas was revealed exactly as it was rolled out and painted on his studio floor.[161] As a result, the canvases covered the gallery's walls in their entirety and ran completely congruent with the vertical surface. To the photographer Cecil Beaton, the paintings suggested floor-to-ceiling backdrops, which he placed models in front of to advertise "The New Soft Look" in *Vogue* magazine. The next year, Betty Parsons loaned twelve works including the relatively smallish 5 ½ x 3-foot *(Black, White and Grey)/Number 11A, 1948* (1948) for an exhibition at the Hilltop Theatre Art Room in Lutherville, Maryland. The painting was subsequently forgotten about until it was recovered in the mid-1950s. But in the meanwhile, the Hilltop Players found *(Black, White and Grey)* worked perfectly as a stage flat in a number of their

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[159]Barnett Newman, "The Plasmic Image," 1945, in *SWI*, 145. According to Thomas Hess, Newman wrote the twelve-part "Plasmic Image" "from around 1943 through 1945." Hess, *Barnett Newman*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 22. According to Mollie McNickel, who wrote the text notes and commentary in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews,* Newman's composition was written over a shorter period of time—in the spring of 1945. See *SWI,* 138.

[160] Storr, "Piece of the Action," 63.

[161] He later stretched them in the usual manner, turning over the edges of the canvas. *JPCR*, 2:98. Jeremy Lewison believes that the paintings may have been stapled directly to the wall. See Lewison, *Interpreting Pollock* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999), 57.

theatrical productions.[162] In 1952, when Howard Devree wrote that Pollock's *Number 7, 1950*, "seems adaptable to decorative mural use" in his review of MoMA's landmark exhibition, "Fifteen Americans" (one of the museum's first shows to include Abstract Expressionists), he was observing what others already knew. But his use of the word "decorative," instilled fear in many artists, Pollock included.[163] As Greenberg later wrote, "Decoration is the specter that haunts modernist painting."[164]

The notion of "the easel picture as a dying form" approximates Dutch artist and one-time Nabi Jan Verkade's urgent plea for late nineteenth-century artists: "Away with easel pictures! Away with that unnecessary piece of furniture! . . . No more perspective! The wall must remain a plain surface, and must not be broken by the presentation of limitless horizons. . . The work of the painter begins where that of the architect is finished. Hence, let us have walls that we may paint them over."[165]

Formally, the abstract expressionists' ethos parallels that of the Nabis who also rejected the Renaissance ideal of easel painting as a window onto a fictional world. Disavowing illusions of depth, they abandoned both linear perspective and modeling and focused on broad planes of unmediated color, thick outlines, and bold patterns. They relied upon line, color, and form to communicate their ideals and evoke emotions. Nabis paintings often feature textured surfaces created by varied brushstrokes. In the words of Maurice Denis, the results remind us that a painting "is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order."[166] This expressed their desire to return painting to its original function as a wall covering related to the architectural setting for

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[162] See *JPCR*, 2:24.

[163] Howard Devree added that "Bradley Walker Tomlin's tasteful decorative canvases are in similar ease." Devree, "Diverse Americans," *New York Times,* April 13, 1952. Frank O'Hara argued, "It is, of course, Pollock's passion as an artist that kept his works from ever being decorative . . . this passion was expressed through scale as one of his important means." O'Hara, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), 28.

[164] Clement Greenberg, "Milton Avery," 1957, *CEC*, vol. 4, 43.

[165] Jan Verkade, (1930), quoted in Nicholas Watkins, "The Genesis of a Decorative Aesthetic," in *Beyond the Easel: Decorative Painting by Bonnard, Vuillard, Denis, and Roussel, 1890–1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

[166] Maurice Denis, from "Definition of Neotraditionism," (1890), in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968; 1984), 94.

which it was intended. Their paintings were not always executed directly on the wall, but more often on canvas and then either affixed to the wall or first stretched onto stretcher bars and then attached to the wall unframed, sometimes with small surrounding bandings *(baguettes)* that served to integrate them into the wall's surface. They referred to these paintings as *decorations* ("There are no paintings, but only decorations!"), which in France had a highly positive and multilayered meaning in the artistic debates of the period (related to large-scale history painting), unlike in English where "decorative/decoration" connotes superficial and limited importance.

While decorative was pejorative for some, in Greenberg's eyes, it was a virtue of modernist painting. He identified decorative with the material and formal qualities of the work, not the expressive aspects. Thus, the decorative painting was part and parcel with advanced painting. It was non-illusionistic, emphasized the flat picture plane, stamped out pictorial depth, and had a centrifugal force (but without a center) that caused the composition to spread out and acknowledge its surface. In writing about Mondrian: "Mondrian's greatness may be said to consist in good measure in having so successfully incorporated the virtues of decoration in easel painting." But one has to be careful. As he continues: "Painting of a kind that identifies itself exclusively with its surface cannot help developing toward decoration and suffering a certain narrowing of its range of expression."[167] He continues this line of argument when he specifically discusses abstract expressionist painting in "Crisis of the Easel Picture." The allover painting "comes closest of all to decoration—to wallpaper patterns capable of being extended indefinitely." The trick is to maintain a certain degree of flatness, but just as crucial, the painting must also incorporate elements of risk, emphasis, and ideas.

William Rubin defined decorative as "the formulaic repetition (hence predictability) of impersonal marks in absolute symmetry on a field of potentially indefinite extension." This is not the case with Pollock, he explains, for his "art involves a mosaic of esthetic decisions in a context of *free choice* over a field whose exact shape

[167] Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," 1949, *CEC*, vol. 2, 315.

and size plays a crucial part."[168] Formulaic, mechanical, or repetitive, Pollock's paintings are not. Close observation reveals variation and nuance in his allover canvases. In some ways, the term "allover," which many people frequently use to describe Pollock's 1947–1951 paintings, is inaccurate since the paint puddles in a variety of ways, the skeins quicken or decelerate, and some areas are much denser than others.[169] And as Greenberg points out, what prevents Pollock's paintings from being decorative is that his "culture as a painter . . . has brought with it a greater concentration on surface texture and tactile qualities, to balance the danger of monotony that arises from the even, all-over design which has become Pollock's consistent practice."[170] Greenberg continued to defend Pollock into the 1950s against detractors who thought of his work as decorative. As he wrote on the black enamel paintings that Pollock produced following his drip/pour canvases: "The more explicit structure of the new work reveals much that was implicit in the preceding phase and should convince any one that this artist is much, much more than a grandiose decorator."[171]

Peter Blake's Ideal Museum: Paintings as Walls

Guggenheim's *Mural* revealed to Pollock what he could achieve in producing a mural-sized canvas, yet one without representational elements traditionally associated with paintings of that size and scale. He found that he enjoyed the freedom that came with working on such a vast surface and was excited by the possibilities that came with pushing the physical as well as conceptual limits of the painting. Although he would have

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[168] William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part I," *Artforum* 5, no. 6 (February 1967): 22 (italics in the original).

[169] Rubin also takes critics to task when he states: "It is surprising how frequently writers on Pollock use the term 'all-over' as if it meant that the pictorial fabric was *literally the same all over the surface.* We read in the most extensive monograph published on Pollock thus far that he '*made every square inch* of the surface of his paintings of equal intensity.' Whatever definition we give of 'intensity'—whether referring to chroma, value, hue, texture or the character of the drawing—such a remark is mindless; the writer relies on the jargon of art writing instead of first-hand experience." Ibid, 19 (italics in the original).

[170] Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Worden Day, Carl Holty, and Jackson Pollock, 1948, *CEC*, vol. 2, 201–202.

[171] Greenberg, "Jackson Pollock's New Style," 1952, *CEC*, vol. 3, 106.

certainly continued to make immense canvases whether he had a buyer for them or not, he also understood that commissions such as Guggenheim's could provide him with alternate opportunities to sell his work. Pollock knew that architects involved in the design and building of modern homes could help to secure the commissions that he sought, and he was open to meeting with them. In September 1947 he wrote to his mother that he'd been meeting with modern architects over the summer and that their response to his work "has been the unexpected."[172] Presumably Pollock means that the "modern architects" responded positively; "the unexpected" alluding to the fact that, as Philip Johnson's symposiums would prove, many architects were wary of working with modern artists as they felt that the commissioned artworks they produced did not always integrate well with their architectural designs.

That summer of 1947, Pollock met Peter Blake, an adventurous architect and spirited critic whom Pollock would soon collaborate with on an architectural project.[173] Blake was born in Berlin, escaped Nazi Germany via London, then moved to the United States where he studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania and worked briefly for Louis Kahn. When he arrived in New York in the mid-1940s, American painting was moving to the fore simultaneous to the formation of a modernist style in American architecture. Blake was in the right place at the right time and came to associate with some of the most important artists and architects of the day including Pollock, Hans Namuth, Marcel Breuer, Charles Eames, Paul Rudolph, and Julian Neski, among many others. "It was a great time to be alive, and all of us sensed it," Blake recalled. "With the

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[172] Letter from Pollock to his mother, Stella, September 3, 1947, in *JPCR*, 4:240.

[173] In a letter to Hans Namuth, Blake recalled that he met Jackson and Krasner in the summer of 1947 when he got out of the army. He spent a few days in Easthampton where Martha Jackson's sister, Peggy, was living at the time. "Mercedes and Herbert Matter had the Pollocks, and Martha, Peggy, and me for dinner at a house they were renting in the Springs." Peter Blake, letter to Hans Namuth, November 12, 1985. Peter Blake Archives, Columbia University, New York. As a practicing architect, Blake designed more than fifty buildings including a hospital in Binghamton, New York; an experimental theater at Vanderbilt University in Brentwood, Tennessee; and the Edward M. Crough Center for Architectural Studies at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He also authored seventeen books on architecture in addition to his memoir, *No Place Like Utopia: Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

war over, the country—indeed, the world—seemed ready to accept new ideas, in all the arts, that had somehow failed to develop during the oppressive thirties."[174]

In 1947, the year that he was introduced to Pollock, Blake also met Philip Johnson, who he soon replaced (at the young age of twenty-eight) as head of the Museum of Modern Art's department of Architecture and Design. Blake was named curator because, as Johnson explained to him, "some of [MoMA's] trustees can't forget my Nazi past and would resign if I became the official director of the department."[175] While the position may have been nominal in nature, Blake spearheaded important architecture and design exhibitions that included the installation of Marcel Breuer's first "binuclear" house in the museum's garden.[176] After a two-year stint at MoMA, Blake moved on to become editor of *Architectural Forum* from 1950–1972, where he consistently featured cutting-edge trends in residential architecture. Later in life Blake would rail against the sterility and ugliness he found in postwar architecture, but in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when he and Pollock were engaged in an active exchange of ideas, he promoted the new trends and wrote monographs on some of modern architecture's key figures including Breuer, Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies, and Johnson.

Blake became a valuable contact for Pollock. He was enthusiastic about the artist's work and was immersed within the burgeoning community of postwar architects who were in a position to encourage their clients to incorporate a Pollock painting in their new homes. Even so, Blake's overtures triggered Pollock's insecurity. When they first met, the artist told Blake, "I think you think of me as somebody who does wallpaper designs for your buildings."[177] Blake would prove Pollock wrong, for he was the first to successfully conjoin Pollock's paintings within modern architectural settings in a way that was no mere decoration, but integral to the architecture's actual design.

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[174] Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 119.
[175] Johnson in Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 108.
[176] According to Blake, they maintained the "fiction," but "nobody, needless to say, was fooled." Ibid. Letterheads of the period list Johnson as executive director, with Blake as curator.
[177] Peter Blake, "Unframed Space: Working with Pollock on the 'Ideal Museum,'" *North Atlantic Review*, no. 10 (1998): 29.

In the summer of 1949, Pollock's mother, Stella, wrote to Jackson's brother Frank, "There were some people out the Sunday we were there to see about a mural in a modern home that is being built he is very much excited about it."[178] At this point, Pollock was becoming increasingly more interested in producing paintings for specific architectural settings. His second exhibition at Parsons was scheduled for November–December of 1949, and he and Blake decided to title the show "Murals in Modern Architecture" as a way to promote the idea of incorporating his paintings within a modern architectural setting. To stimulate interest in their plan, Blake conceived and constructed what he called an "Ideal Museum"—a two-by-four foot model-sized building based on Mies van der Rohe's Ideal Museum for a Small City (1942), which in turn derived from Mies's German Pavilion for the Barcelona International Exposition (1929)—within which he incorporated miniaturized versions of Pollock's paintings.[179] The Ideal Museum would become the centerpiece of the show.[180]

Blake's model museum consisted of a simple, horizontal pavilion with a flat, opaque Plexiglas roof that hovered over the base. He left its sides open so that one could readily view the model's interior where, in place of walls, Blake had divided the interior space with eight of Pollock's "paintings" that stood freestanding or supported from the

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[178] Stella Pollock in letter to Frank Pollock, June 26, 1949, *JPCR* 4:245.

[179] Mies van der Rohe designed his Ideal Museum for a Small City as a counterpart to megalithic constructions that had become the norm for urban museums. The design was published in the May 1943 issue of *Architectural Forum*. It should be noted that within his design sketches, Mies included a reproduction of a Kandinsky's *Painting with White Form* (1913) that he placed free-floating within the museum's interior. Further, he imagined Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) as a freestanding wall. As such, the painting stood isolated from its surroundings, but at the same time united with the building as an architectural element. Blake greatly admired Mies and in his 1960 monograph on the architect noted that George Kolbe's sculpture, as positioned within the Barcelona Pavilion's enclosed courtyard, "has become a favorite example of those who advocate collaboration between architects on the one hand and sculptors and painters on the other." Blake, *Mies van der Rohe* (New York: Pelican, 1960), 54.

[180] The original model was either lost or destroyed; yet it is visible in a number of Hans Namuth's 1950s photographs of Pollock in his studio. In 1981 the Centre Pompidou, Paris, had considered a recreation of the Ideal Museum to be exhibited in conjunction with its Pollock retrospective of that year, but the museum ran out of money and nothing ever came of the idea. In 1995, Blake received funding from the Pollock-Krasner Study Center, East Hampton, New York, to complete a replica of the Ideal Museum. It is currently in storage at the Pollock-Krasner Study Center.

ceiling, forming both architecture and exhibition (fig. 2.8).[181] Pollock and Blake used reproductions from exhibition catalogues and the recently published three-page photo essay on Pollock in *Life* magazine.[182] Most of the paintings were from the artist's more recent "drip/pour" series with the exception of *Gothic* (1944) and *The Key* (1946).[183] Because the images were clipped from a variety of sources, the paintings were not proportionately scaled to the model or one another. Some of the reproductions were installed in their entirety, such as the frieze *Summertime* (1949), but others were cut so that only a portion or detail of the original was shown. In one instance, they took a relatively small, vertical painting, *Number 24, 1949* rotated it ninety degrees, and blew it up into a horizontal mural-sized canvas. Even though the "paintings" were not to scale, Blake maintained their large size and scale relative to the dimensions of the "museum's" interior. The Ideal Museum provided him with an opportunity to realize, in concept, the notion of an open plan in which Pollock's paintings functioned as partition walls. In his memoir, "Unframed Space: Working with Pollock on the 'Ideal Museum,'" he wrote, "the idea was to pretend it was an actual building, with a translucent roof about twelve feet above the floor. I had no idea how the roof could possibly be supported but I didn't really care and I didn't particularly care how big the paintings were in reality; I made them any size that seemed to be appropriate for the space."[184] By treating Pollock's "paintings" as partitions or vertical constructions, Blake capitalized on their physicality. The **"**paintings" hung suspended between the floor and ceiling and thus functioned as walls in their own right, asserting their own spatial identity and defining interior configurations.[185] In some places they actually supported the plastic roof. Arthur

[181] Blake also had Pollock create three plaster-dipped wire "sculptures" splashed with paint that the architect likened to three-dimensional versions of his drip paintings.
[182] Dorothy Seiberling, "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," *Life* 27, no. 6 (August 8, 1949): 42–45.
[183] The other "paintings" included *Summertime: Number 9A, 1948*; *Number 10, 1949*; *Number 17A, 1948*; *Alchemy* (1947); *Number 1A 1948*; and *Number 24, 1949*.
[184] Blake, "Unframed Space: Working with Pollock on the 'Ideal Museum,'" 31.
[185] The only wall within the ensemble that was not a Pollock painting was a curved screen of perforated brass, which served as background for one of three sculptures that Pollock produced for the museum. According to Eric Lum, the perforated screen descends from the semicircular

Drexler, *Interior* magazine's architecture editor and future director of MoMA's Architecture and Design department wrote in a review that "in its treatment of paintings as walls the design recalls an entirely different kind of pictorial art; that of the Renaissance fresco. The project suggests a re-integration of painting and architecture wherein painting *is* the architecture, but this time without message or content. Its sole purpose is to heighten our experience of space."[186]

The perforated pegboard that Blake used for the "museum's" floor also contributed to the notion of paintings as walls, for it permitted them to be moved around like modular wall units, which, at least in one instance, did occur.[187] When Helen Harrison, director of the Pollock-Krasner Study Center, commissioned Blake to reconstruct the Ideal Museum in 1995, she felt it important that he once again utilize a gridded material for the floor in order to maintain the feeling of a modular system (while acknowledging that a perforated surface would be totally impractical in an actual museum) (fig. 2.9).[188] The gridded floor also recalls Le Corbusier's Dom-ino system, which allowed partitions to be positioned as one wished within the grid, thus modulating the interior space. In fact, Blake's Ideal Museum incorporated three of Le Corbusier's cardinal principles: the free plan, in which Pollock's "paintings" played an integral part,

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Macassar ebony wall in the dining area of Mies's Tugendhat House. Eric Lum, "Pollock's Promise: Toward an Abstract Expressionist Architecture," *Assemblage*, no. 39 (August 1999): 64.

[186] Arthur Drexler, "Unframed Space: A Museum for Jackson Pollack's [sic] Paintings," *Interiors and Industrial Design* 109, no. 6 (January 1950): 90. Drexler later became the curator and director of the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Architecture and Design (1951–85) where he organized shows of Le Corbusier, Louis I. Kahn, Richard Neutra, and Antonio Gaudí. He is also credited with acquiring industrial design objects and architectural drawings for the Museum's collection.

[187] Only four published photographs of the "Ideal Museum" appear to exist: three by Arthur Drexler that accompanied his review in *Interiors*, and one by Ben Schultz, which is the most frequently reproduced. It shows both Pollock and Blake peering into their "museum." A comparison of two Drexler photos reveals that *Number 24, 1949* was rotated so that in one instance it faced away from the museum and in the second it directly faced *Summertime*, suggesting that the paintings were as flexible as modular walls.

[188] Blake wrote to Harrison that he and Pollock didn't much like the pegboard, but used it because it was readily available at the time. Peter Blake in letter to Helen Harrison, December 7, 1994. Peter Blake Papers.

the free façade (non-supporting walls), and the flat roof. It would have included a fourth had Blake incorporated glass: ribbon windows.

The Ideal Museum was never realized, but it does represent, at least in model form, the first instance of a modern museum designed explicitly to house a grouping of large abstract expressionist paintings.[189] Many abstract expressionists attempted to exert control over the presentation of their work because they recognized the powerful effect a group of paintings would have upon the viewer rather than a single canvas, or worse, to some such as Rothko, to prevent having their paintings mixed in with those of other artists. But exhibiting a large number of paintings that dominated the viewer's field of vision effectuated more than a visual experience, it initiated a somatic one as well. Monumental canvases were especially conducive in instigating this effect. It was for this reason, as E. C. Goossen noted in his essay "The Big Canvas," that abstract expressionists did not adjust the size of their canvases to "the size of the kinds of rooms we currently live in."[190] The abstract expressionists, Pollock included, continued to paint large pictures, which resulted in a fusion of painting and architecture because, as Claude Cernuschi observed, "a marriage between painting and architecture could best provide the degree of control they so desired."[191] And the Ideal Museum, while it never went beyond model form, remained in a prominent place on one of Pollock's studio tables where it continually reminded the artist of the possibilities of size and scale, and how well his paintings integrated with a modern architectural setting.

The Geller House: Painting as Room Divider

On all accounts, Pollock's 1949 exhibition at Parsons was a success. He sold work, garnered further acclaim, and, with the help of Peter Blake and the Ideal Museum,

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[189] Varnedoe writes that "the building itself never drew a patron," suggesting that it was a possibility that Blake had in mind. Varnedoe, *Pollock* 1998, 57.
[190] E.C Goossen, "The Big Canvas," 62.
[191] Cernuschi also notes in reference to the "Ideal Museum" that the idea of paintings as walls was strikingly original. Claude Cernuschi, *Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 238–39.

secured a commission, which had been a primary objective of theirs.[192] Pollock had become a "celebrity" and it was considered chic to own a painting by a famous artist. The commission materialized in early December when Marcel Breuer, who up until that time was completely unfamiliar with Pollock's work, visited the "Murals in Modern Architecture" exhibition at Blake's behest. Breuer had recently left his teaching position at Harvard to devote himself to an independent architectural practice in New York. It was in fact, a newly completed project that had convinced Breuer to go out on his own: one of his most important designs in residential architecture—the binuclear house—commissioned by Phyllis and Bertram Geller in a suburb of Long Island.[193] According to Blake, Breuer was so impressed by Pollock's work that "he called the Gellers immediately and secured the commission for Jackson to do a mural."[194] The Ideal Museum helped to convince Breuer of how well a Pollock painting could wed itself to the unique and modern house type he had recently designed and built for the Gellers. And the site perfectly suited Pollock, who by this time, as Kirk Varnedoe notes, was "No longer aiming just for paintings on walls, [but] entertained a new notion, more in line with the opened-up interiors of modern domestic architecture, of hanging or mounting large pictures independently, to act as walls of their own."[195] And this is exactly how Breuer and Pollock opted to install the Geller's commissioned painting.

The Geller House is recognized as one of the most influential American houses of the 1940s. The success of its design is due to the fact that it so comfortably suited the postwar generation in need of a new American house type. It was not exactly a modest

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[192] Eighteen of the twenty-seven exhibited paintings sold from the 1949 exhibition, including two mural-sized paintings. This was Pollock's most successful exhibition to date, which Naifeh and Smith attribute to the artist's recent profile in *Life* magazine.

[193] The accounts detailing the Gellers's commission of a Pollock painting state that Breuer was in the process of designing their home, but he had actually begun sketches for the house in December 1944, initiated building in 1945, and completed the residence in early 1946 following a five-month interruption caused by a glass strike. Therefore, the Gellers had been living in their home for approximately three years before Breuer approached Pollock about producing a painting for their living room. See Isabelle Hyman, *Marcel Breuer, Architect: The Career and the Buildings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 344; Naifeh/Smith, 601.

[194] Naifeh/Smith, 601.

[195] Varnedoe notes that Pollock had begun taking down walls and opening up the living space of his own home in the Springs. Varnedoe, *Pollock,* 1998, 57. See also Potter, *Violent Grave*, 107.

house designed for a working-class family, but rather one that embodied the glamorous, upper-middle-class modern lifestyle, which is precisely how *House & Garden* and *Progressive Architecture* presented it.[196] The Gellers were no ordinary couple. They were young, adventurous, and trendsetting, and the house they requested from Breuer was startlingly modern, especially within their conservative neighborhood of traditional Colonials and Tudors.[197]

As a binuclear house, its design featured two separate wings: one for the private (bedrooms) and one for the public (living, dining, kitchen area) sections of the residence. An entrance hallway connected the structure's two wings and its distinctive V-shaped or "butterfly" roof (two opposing roof surfaces sloping down toward the middle) became part of the popular modernist style vocabulary. In 1948, Blake, under the direction of Philip Johnson, invited Breuer to design and construct an exhibition house for installation in MoMA's garden. Breuer opted to exhibit his binuclear design. It set the standard for good design and the small postwar house and became the first modern house seen by more than 70,000 people, which set off a flurry of interest in the architect's work.[198]

When the Gellers commissioned the Pollock painting, their only request was that the painting's ground be as close as possible to the rust color of *Arabesque*, 1948.[199] In

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[196] According to Isabelle Hyman, the typical Breuer client was wealthy and well educated, and sought an architect-designed modern house, often on substantial private property and occasionally with costly requirements. Bert Geller had majored in philosophy at Dartmouth, but later became a renowned designer of women's shoes. He eventually became president of his uncle's company, Andrew Geller Shoes, and created the patented Strada shoe. He also won CLIO awards in 1978 and 1979. "Obituary," *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (October 20, 1981). http://dartmouthalumnimagazine.com/?s=geller&obits. See also "Tomorrow's House Today," *House & Garden* 91 (January 1947): 60–65; "The Geller House, Long Island, USA," *Architectural Review* 102 (October 1947): 115–18; "The Geller House, Lawrence, Long Island," *Progressive Architecture* 41 (February 1947): 50-66.

[197] According to David Masello, the Geller house had quite an impact on the town—Lawrence, Long Island—as well as on the whole of American residential architecture. David Masello, *Architecture Without Rules: The Houses of Marcel Breuer and Herbert Beckhard* (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 15–22.

[198] The house was on view from April 14 to October 30, 1949. Blake's monograph, *Marcel Breuer*, was published as the exhibition's catalogue.

[199] Krasner recalls that the canvas for this work was painted red to match the commercially stained canvas for *Number13A: Arabesque* (1948) and *Number 2, 1949*. When the painting was shown at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1963, it was titled *Mural on Red Ground*.

this way, the canvas would harmonize with the color scheme Breuer had chosen for their home's interior, which focused on earth tones and incorporated natural materials such as a fieldstone, cedar siding, and natural birchwood.[200] Pollock completed the six-by-eight foot *Untitled (Mural)* in March 1950. Soon after, he and his friend Giorgio Cavallon installed the painting within the living room/dining area, which, based on an open plan, consisted of a single space measuring thirty four by sixteen feet. Since they could not leave the painting's verso exposed, they mounted the painting on to the back of a bookcase designed and built by Cavallon (fig. 2.10). Thus from one side, the painting appeared as a freestanding wall where it stood as a divider between the dining and living rooms and in a real and tangible way created space.[201] This was the first instance of a freestanding Pollock, but by no means the last.[202]

The Ideal Beach House

The notion of conjoining Pollock's canvases with a modern architectural structure continued to engage Peter Blake. As he later recalled, "there was something about Jackson's work which was totally beyond the kind of framed picture that you hang on a wall or over a fireplace, something that related to the type of architecture my friends [and he, too] were interested in." For this reason, following the Ideal Museum and shortly after the success of the Geller commission, when Blake embarked on his first realized architectural project, Pollock's canvases were to play an integral part. Blake designed a beach house for his family, begun in 1952 and completed in 1954, that stood in Watermill, New York, a relatively short distance from the Springs.[203] The Pinwheel

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[200] Breuer also installed washable walls in the playroom, enabling the Geller's three children to draw or paint on them. Further, interior doors were painted in a "spatter-dash" effect as part of Breuer's "war against fingerprints." See "Tomorrow's House Today," 67.

[201] Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, 151.

[202] According to Francis O'Connor, Mrs. Geller "hated" the painting. When the Gellers commissioned a second home from Breuer, built in 1968–69, the painting did not accompany them. Instead, William Rubin purchased it and subsequently sold it to the Empress of Iran. It is now in storage at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Francis O'Connor, email message to author, August 2008. See also Robert Tait, "The Art No One Sees: A Basement that Symbolises Cultural Isolation," October 29, 2007, *The Guardian*.

[203] Between 1954 and 1962, Blake would build a dozen weekend houses in the Hamptons.

House, as it came to be known, was a variation of the Ideal Museum, thus another descendant of Mies's glass pavilions, but also a contemporary of his Farnsworth House (1945-51). Unlike Mies's designs, which were rectangular in shape, Blake fashioned his beach house as a square that measured twenty-four feet on each side. It was, essentially, a spare white square box of glass, wood, and concrete that sat on a smaller plinth. Key to its design were the four outside walls, which Blake hung from overhead tracks so that they could slide out into the landscape, opening up the house to a direct infusion of air and sunlight. In its open form, with the walls extended out, the house resembled a pinwheel (fig. 2.11). Blake's original intent was to have Pollock execute four eight-by-eighteen foot paintings that he would then attach to the panels, turning the paintings into walls. As Blake acknowledged, "I think his paintings might make terrific walls. After all, architects spend a lot of time thinking about walls."[204] When open, the paintings would have extended out into the landscape. When closed, they would have created a painted environment, preceding what Mark Rothko would achieve in the Houston Chapel by almost twenty years. Blake completed the house, but without Pollock's murals, which proved beyond the architect's budget. Had he been able to afford the four Pollock paintings and used them as sliding walls, it would have been a complete assimilation of Pollock's painting into architecture. In concept, Blake's beach house represents another instance in which Pollock's paintings were considered integral to the architectural design and not merely as decorative asides.

That Pollock's paintings conjured a seamless integration within modernist architecture was not unique to professional architects. Evelyn Segal recounts a group visit to Pollock's studio/barn in September 1949 that included Clement Greenberg and Robert Motherwell, amongst others. On the floor were huge canvases that the artist had been working on, most likely those that would debut in "Murals in Modern Architecture" in November. As Segal observed, "Pollock's paintings could be architectural accessories, and hung well and naturally on walls of contemporary architecture. They are not tender

[204] Blake, *No Place Like Utopia*, 113–14.

or romantic, but neither are steel and concrete and plastics, or the materials used in contemporary structures."[205]

The art historian and influential professor, S. Lane Faison, Jr., concurred. In his review of Pollock's first retrospective (which traveled from Bennington to Williams College), he declared: "Pollock is, it seems to me, primarily a mural painter, not merely because his canvases often reach huge sizes (one in the exhibition is twenty by nine feet), but because they justify such size in their bold design and in their insistence on flatness of the canvas surface itself. They ought to be placed in a context of modern architecture, and with plenty of space around them. It was not possible to show them properly, but even so, they animate a plane with great intensity of feeling; and though the effect makes forceful decoration, it goes much deeper than that in emotional terms."[206] Yet decorators did appreciate Pollock's work and how well it seemed to harmonize with modern domestic settings. Witness the Knoll catalogues advertising furniture for the modern home and office in addition to Benjamin Baldwin, one of the most respected and influential interior designers of his day, who recommended Pollock's paintings for inclusion in the 1949 launch of *Interior Design Magazine*.[207]

Freestanding Paintings

Pollock may have recognized the impossibility of having an Ideal Museum built for his paintings, but he could more readily turn Parsons's gallery into a semblance of that idea to coincide with or accentuate the model that Blake had built. The notion of freestanding paintings seems to have occurred to Pollock at least two years before Blake's concept of an Ideal Museum, just about the time that he began making his drip/pour paintings during the summer of 1947. That year Pollock had seen some frames that the architect Tony Smith had designed for their mutual friend Gerome Kamrowski, a Surrealist painter who Pollock had worked with in the easel division of the W.P.A. and

[205] Evelyn Segal, 1949, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.
[206] S. Lane Faison, Jr., draft of his review of Pollock's retrospective, Williams College, to be published in the *Berkshire Eagle*, December 1952, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.
[207] See letter from H.K. Kelland, Managing Editor, *Interior Design*, to Pollock, January 31, 1949, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.

with whom he later experimented (along with William Baziotes) in making collaborative spontaneous works with quick-drying lacquer paint.[208] Kamrowski had made some small, double-sided paintings that he wanted to install as freestanding objects in the middle of Parsons's gallery for one of his exhibitions.[209] It was the concept of freestanding paintings that first established Smith's friendship with Pollock. As the architect later recalled:

> I had seen Jackson's painting at Peggy's [Guggenheim] gallery and was mad about it. When I saw him again it was at a specific time and for a specific purpose. He had seen some frames he liked which I had designed for Kamrowski's paintings. Jackson was about to have his first show at Betty's and asked Betty if I would design some kind of floating panels for him. In the summer of 47 we all went out to the Springs to talk about some way of displaying his paintings. When I saw the painting, I said 'It's ridiculous to put painting of this scale out there in space. They should be against a solid wall, out there they would become decorative objects.' I refused to have anything to do with it. It would reduce his paintings.[210]

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[208] Jeffrey Wechsler suggests that Kamrowski and Baziotes introduced Pollock to automatism. See Jeffrey Wechsler, *Surrealism and American Art, 1931–1947* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Art Gallery, 1977), 55–68. Also, Martica Sawin, "'The Third Man,' or Automatism American Style," *Art Journal* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 181–186. Kamrowski and Smith had met while at the New Bauhaus in Chicago.

[209] It is also possible that Kamrowski exhibited these double-sided, freestanding paintings at the Hugo Gallery's "Bloodflames" exhibition (February–March 1947) designed by Kiesler. Smith had hoped to design the show, but it went to Kiesler, who included freestanding paintings in addition to installing a Matta painting on the gallery's ceiling.

[210] Smith and Pollock most likely met at the Art Students League in the 1930s. According to Naifeh/Smith, they both attended Peter Busa's wedding in June 1944. They may have become reacquainted when Smith designed the "Northwest Coast Indian Art" show at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1946. Smith claims that he didn't really get to know Pollock until 1948 when Pollock asked the architect/designer for advice on how to hang his show at Parsons Gallery. It was around that time that Smith visited Pollock at his studio in the Springs. He later recalled, "From that time on I saw a great deal of Jackson. It was a peculiar thing: he seemed to think of me as someone who identified with him in some way." Tony Smith in undated "Draft for *Art in America* 'Who Was Jackson Pollock?'" (subsequently published in May/June 1967), TSEA.

We don't know exactly which paintings Pollock showed Smith, but one might assume that they were the larger drip/pour canvases that he had begun working on in anticipation of his upcoming show at Parsons. How these might be recognized as decorative objects is difficult to imagine, but what's important is that Pollock wished to exhibit the paintings freestanding and that Smith, as an architect, recognized that they should share the solidity of the wall. Smith would soon devote a considerable amount of thought in finding ways to integrate Pollock's paintings as two-dimensional components within his designs for modern churches, museums, and exhibition venues. In fact, he would even change his mind about Pollock's paintings reducing themselves to decorative objects as freestanding canvases in a design for a tent in which he planned to exhibit Pollock's large-sized canvases as freestanding partitions.

The idea of installing Pollock's post-1947 paintings as freestanding objects seems to have occurred to others as well. Smith recalled that in the late 1940s Katharine Ordway, a client of Parsons and collector of Pollock's paintings, had wanted a Pollock that she could install freestanding on the outdoor patio of her Weston, Connecticut estate.[211] She had seen his "Murals in Modern Architecture" and proposed having one of Pollock's canvases encased in glass. It was Smith who she asked to research the possibility. Smith found that Libbey-Owens-Ford had recently begun to factory-produce Thermopane, an insulated double-glazed window with a pocket of inert gas trapped between the panes designed to increase the insulating quality of the window. It soon became clear to Smith that while Thermopane might make a great curtain wall, the manufacturing process wouldn't work for encasing paintings.[212]

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[211] Ordway was an heir of the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (more commonly known as 3M). When her father died in 1948, she and her four brothers were left an $18.8 million estate. She used the money to collect art (and later donated her collection to Yale University Art Gallery) and for land conservation. She eventually became one of the greatest private contributors to natural land conservation in American history, second only to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. This includes 31,000 acres of Great Plains prairies in addition to other parts of the country. She also purchased a number of Pollock paintings on paper in addition to *Number 4, 1949*, which had been exhibited in the "Murals in Modern Architecture" exhibition.

[212] Tony Smith, draft of a letter to Brydon Smith, c. 1968, TSEA.

Smith recounted that this failed effort to encase a painting in Thermopane may have been what led Pollock to paint directly on glass in the now famous Hans Namuth film.[213] After Smith had concluded that Thermopane would not work, his sister showed him a "Painting-on-Glass" kit for children that she had bought. She left it with Smith who, in turn, gave it to Pollock.[214] A few years later, Pollock created his only painting on glass, *Untitled Number 29, 1950*, which Namuth documented in his film in the fall of 1950.[215] Shortly after the filming, William Wright asked Pollock about the painting, which he noticed in a corner of the artist's studio during the course of their interview. Pollock replied: "Well, that's something new for me. That's the first thing I've done on glass and I find it very exciting." And further, without any prompting, he added: "I think the possibilities of using glass in modern architecture—in modern construction—terrific." Wright pressed further and asked: "In the event that you do more of these for modern buildings, would you continue to use various objects?" to which Pollock responded: "I think so, yes. The possibilities, it seems to me are endless, what one can do with glass. It seems to me a medium that's very much related to contemporary painting."[216] And, as we shall see, to contemporary architecture, for Tony Smith would soon design a church in which Pollock's paintings on glass would play an integral role.

In the meanwhile, *Untitled Number 29, 1950* sat outside on Pollock's front porch for months where it collected leaves and withstood the winter weather. A year or so later, the artist decided to have it framed and called on Smith to design a proper structure. After investigating a variety of materials, Smith devised a support for the painting—a materially dense work composed of enamel, oil, aluminum paint, wire lathe mesh, string, colored glass, and pebbles. In 1952 Dorothy Miller included *Untitled Number 29, 1950*

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[213] Namuth claims that it was his idea to film Pollock painting on glass; Peter Blake insists that he is the one who instigated it. See Potter, *Violent Grave*, 168. To film an artist painting on glass was not an entirely new idea. A year before, in 1949, Paul Haesaerts had filmed Pablo Picasso painting on a sheet of glass while facing the camera, which he titled *Visite à Picasso* (1950).
[214] Tony Smith, undated letter to Brydon Smith, TSEA.
[215] Now in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
[216] Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," 1950, *JPIAR*, 23.

in MoMA's "Fifteen Americans" exhibition where it jutted out from the wall and stood, unframed and suspended between two poles, as a three-dimensional object.

"Persistent Talk of Mural Commissions"

With the completion of the Geller's *Mural* in March 1950 (and installed shortly thereafter in their Breuer-designed home), Pollock's interest in commissioned paintings accelerated. That June he wrote to Betty Parsons "I want to mention that I am going to try and get some mural commissions through an agent." As he explained to his dealer, mural commissions would provide a way for him to get out of the "financial mess" he felt that he was in as well as "broaden his possibilities." He also emphasized that he felt it important to "develop in this direction," implying that he didn't feel that he'd exhausted either the technical or aesthetic possibilities of working on a large scale.[217] Parsons was not very happy with Pollock's decision to work with another art dealer and reminded the artist that hers was "the only gallery that can show big pictures related to murals."[218] It is telling that Parsons described Pollock's paintings as "related" to murals, for by 1950 she clearly recognized that the kind of paintings that he was making were not traditional murals, but related to them only in size.

Storr writes that as concerns Pollock, "no complex analysis of what muralism in its fully evolved state could mean for abstract painting was ever developed. . . Site-specific painting was [Pollock's] road not taken."[219] But throughout 1950–51, fueled by the success of the Geller commission, Pollock continually sought opportunities for the site-specific installation of his canvases. Perhaps a road not taken, but certainly a path he repeatedly tried to pursue. Indeed, as Krasner noted, "the idea of putting his work into architectural settings was a constant aspiration."[220] Over the fall he contacted a number of prospective clients including the designer Hans Knoll, the actor Burgess Meredith, and

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[217] Pollock in letter to Betty Parsons, 1950, *JPCR* 4:245.
[218] Parsons in letter to Jackson Pollock, June 25, 1950, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.
[219] Storr, "Piece of the Action," 65.
[220] Krasner quoted in E.A. Carmean, Jr., "The *Church Project*: Pollock's Passion Themes," 122n7.

the collector Mrs. Valentine (Happy) Macy.[221] By early winter it became apparent that his proposals were going nowhere.[222] Several months later he engaged in discussions with Reeves Lewenthal of Associated American Artists about a possible mural commission. By mid-summer, this project had also fallen through.[223]

According to Pollock's biographers, Naifeh and Smith, in the late 1940s, there was "persistent talk of mural commissions in California."[224] They may be alluding to Ray and Charles Eames who had established their office in Venice, California. Pollock's friend, Herbert Matter, may have served as conduit since he had relocated to Los Angeles to work with the Eameses on furniture design from 1943 to 1946 while also designing covers for Los Angeles–based *Arts & Architecture* magazine.[225] Herbert Matter also tried to help Pollock secure commissions by featuring some of his paintings in Knoll furniture catalogues (1949–50; 1953) highlighting the natural union of modern painting in a modern setting.[226] Or perhaps it was Krasner who initiated "talk" with the Eameses, for she and Ray had studied together with Hans Hoffman and maintained a close friendship. Ray had even come to New York in 1949 to help with the installation of one of Pollock's shows. At the time of the "persistent talk of mural commissions," the Eameses, as part of the *Arts & Architecture* magazine's "Case Study" program, were in the midst of designing and building their groundbreaking Eames House, Case Study House #8 (1945–

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[221] Pollock had met Burgess Meredith when he worked as a key grip on a few sequences of the film *Works of Calder*, which Meredith and Herbert Matter co-produced in 1948–-50. Landau, *Pollock Matters*, 34.

[222] In a December 12, 1950, letter to Pollock from Ossorio, the artist/collector asked, "Did anything develop from all the projects? Knoll, Meredith, Happy, etc.?" Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA. Pollock responded on January 6, 1951: "Nothing came of Meredith, Knoll, Happy." O'Connor believes that Pollock is referring to mural commissions. *JPCR* 4:257–58.

[223] On June 7, 1951, Pollock wrote to Ossorio and Ted Dragon that he was going to see Lewenthal that Monday. "The gallery," he wrote, "is a department store of junk, but they do terrific business." *JPCR* 4:262. On August 6, 1951, Pollock wrote to Ossorio and Dragon once again to tell them that "The mural isn't definitely out—but is a matter of waiting (how long I don't know) and it involves other things and people too damned involved to try and explain in a letter." *JPCR* 4:263.

[224] Naifeh/Smith, 613.

[225] Matter may have been instrumental in arranging for Pollock's first full-length interview, which was published in the February 1944 issue of *Arts & Architecture*.

[226] See *Pollock Matters*, 176.

49), as their home. It is intriguing to imagine the possible interaction of Pollock's canvases within these modern homes.

Pollock had supporters other than Matter and Blake who did what they could to help him attain commissions. This included Alfonso Ossorio who wanted to see Pollock's paintings integrated in Tony Smith's design for a modern church (too modern, as we shall see). There was also Reginald Isaacs, an architect and Planning Director for the Michael Reese Hospital, a large public hospital in Chicago designed in the International Style (with the assistance of Walter Gropius). In the winter of 1952 Isaacs wrote to one of the hospital's board members, Isadore Rosenfield, stressing the importance of art in hospitals as a way to encourage the idea that a hospital is not just a place of illness and sadness. As he explained," I am very anxious to see public and semi-public buildings integrate architecture, sculpture, painting and other art forms. Personally I do not believe that our jobs as architects are completely without consideration and planning for color, lighting and these art media." He recommended Pollock "should you have the opportunity to install mural painting in any hospital building."[227] While nothing came of Isaacs's recommendation, Pollock was certainly grateful for his help. The following month Isaacs wrote to Pollock thanking him for the "magnanimous gift of the painting [*No. 2, 1950*] to us."[228]

In addition to private homes, hospitals, and a church, Pollock also negotiated with Adam Gimbel, one of the most powerful figures in the retailing industry, to create a large-format painting for Saks Fifth Avenue's first suburban store, which opened in White Plains, New York, in August 1954. Pollock's dealer at the time, Sidney Janis, arranged the meeting with Gimbel who was interested in a twenty-by-fifteen foot painting for the entranceway of his new branch. A conflict in approach brought the meeting to naught and instead, the commission went to Nanno de Groot who produced a large black,

[227] Reginald Isaacs in letter to Isadore Rosenfield, January 22, 1952, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.
[228] Reginald Isaacs in letter to Jackson Pollock, February 22, 1952, Pollock/Krasner Papers, AAA.

white, and blue abstraction illuminated by cathode lamps.[229] A few years later, Martha Jackson, recognizing the financial reward to be gained from mural commissions, tried to lure Pollock from Janis Gallery by telling him that she was going to set up a "Department of Architecture" with an in-house architect who would specialize in organizing collaborations. But in the end, Pollock only came to realize two site-specific commissions—the Guggenheim and the Geller paintings.

"Think Big": Pollock's Paintings Create an Environment

Nineteen-fifty proved a big year for Pollock. That summer he completed three of his largest paintings since the Guggenheim *Mural*.[230] They directly succeeded the Geller *Mural* and were executed with the idea of future commissions in mind. Tony Smith may also have encouraged their size. He "exhorted [Pollock] repeatedly to 'think big'" arguing that "'great art demands an appropriate scale.'"[231] Nineteen-fifty was also his most prolific year, for he produced at least fifty canvases, thirty-two of which he would exhibit in his fourth show at Parsons that November/December.[232] These paintings represent the culmination of his "drip/pour" technique that he had been developing over the past three years. There he debuted his three monumental (and most celebrated) canvases: *Number 28, 1950* (5 feet, 8 inches by 8 feet, 9 inches), *Number 30, 1950* (now

[229] Pollock made the following notations on the back of the letter Janis sent him: "*No sketches* / acceptance of / *What I do*." Francis O'Connor believes that Pollock may have refused Gimbel's request for advance sketches of the mural, which would be the normal procedure for such a commission. He also feels that the potential sponsors may not have trusted Pollock's technical ability, given his unconventional painting technique, or his capacity to complete such a large and complex project by the assigned deadline, given his drinking and failing health. O'Connor in *JPCR* Supplement, 53. On de Groot's painting, see "New Store Opened by Saks Fifth Avenue," *New York Times*, August 5, 1954.

[230] Claude Cernuschi argues that no Pollock painting could have extended beyond nine feet in both height and width due to the artist's physical reach as well as perceptual field. Cernuschi, "Cutting Pollock Down to Size: The Boundaries of the Poured Technique," in *Pollock Matters*, 76.

[231] Naifeh and Smith quote Lee Krasner as saying this. See Naifeh/Smith, 613.

[232] November 28–December 16, 1950.

known as *Autumn Rhythm*) (8 feet, 10 1/2 inches by 17 feet, 8 inches), and *Number 31, 1950* (later called *One*) (8 feet, 10 inches by 17 feet, 6 inches).[233]

It's a wonder that the thirty-two paintings even fit in Parsons's gallery. By comparison, Barnett Newman's show, which had opened at the beginning of the year with eleven paintings, must have looked spare.[234] Admittedly, not all of the paintings Pollock presented were as colossal as the now famous "triumvirate," but even the smaller canvases he made appeared more sizable than their individual physical dimensions. Probably for reasons of space, Pollock elected to stack twelve roughly twenty-two-by-twenty-two inch square paintings in groups of four (fig. 2.12). In this configuration, they extended in length from the wall's baseboard to the upper height of the hanging strip conveying the appearance of three individual vertical paintings.[235] Two columns of four hung at either side of *Autumn Rhythm*, and rather than being dwarfed by the monstrous dimensions of the 1950 masterpiece, they held their own while emphasizing the former painting's largeness.[236] *Number 29,1950,* his recently completed painting on glass, also made its first appearance in the show and assuredly would have jutted out into the gallery

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[233] There is no methodology to Pollock's numbering of his canvases. The numbers do not indicate the order in which they were painted, but instead, in some cases, the order in which they were taken out of the "barn studio." For an in-depth formal analysis of these three paintings (and Pollock's 1950 canvases in general), see E.A. Carmean, Jr., "Jackson Pollock: Classic Paintings of 1950," in *American Art at Mid-Century: The Subjects of the Artist* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1973), 127–53.

[234] January 23–February 12, 1950.

[235] The tradition at Parsons Gallery was to have gallery artists install each other's shows. According to Naifeh and Smith, a winter storm prevented Pollock from arriving in New York until the day before the opening of his show. Giorgio Cavallon, Alfonso Ossorio, and Ted Dragon helped Pollock unroll canvases. Gerome Kamrowski stopped by the gallery; Krasner, Ray Eames, and Parsons watched over the installation of the show. Tony Smith most likely participated as it had been customary for him to help hang Parsons's gallery shows. Newman may also have put in an appearance the night before the opening of the show since he was not only Pollock's friend, but also the gallery's de facto director. Naifeh/Smith, 654. Based on a Hans Namuth photo, T.J. Clark suspects there may have been thirteen twenty-two–by–twenty-two–inch paintings, but he states this with some hesitation, as he has no proof. The catalogue raisonné lists only twelve twenty-two-by-twenty-two-inch paintings. See T.J. Clark, "Pollock's Smallness," *New Approaches*, 20–21.

[236] As T.J. Clark explains, bigness needed smallness in order for the physical size of Pollock's canvases as well as their internal painterly incidents to fully register. Ibid., 15–31.

space, residing (as it must have been) in the freestanding framing device that Tony Smith had designed especially for the work.

Pollock's canvases occupied almost all of the gallery's available wall space. As one entered into the main exhibition room through a corner doorway, the viewer immediately faced *Lavender Mist*, a painting with alternately delicate and dense skeins of blue-gray, pinkish-taupe, and white (on the west wall). On their immediate right hung the majestic *Autumn Rhythm: Number 20, 1950*, tucked in under a soffit with a boxed-out structural support at its side creating an architectural niche for the painting. The canvas occupied the north wall in its entirety and the likelihood of Pollock intuiting the area's dimensions so perfectly are highly improbable. One can only conclude that *Autumn Rhythm: Number 20, 1950*'s placement was site-specific and that the artist wholly intended to abolish as much visible wall space as possible and replace it with the alternately thick and thin weave of browns, blacks and whites that accumulate across the expanse of the painting's surface. At the viewer's immediate left (east wall) hung the eight-foot high and two-foot wide *Number 2*, *1950*. Executed as a horizontal painting, Pollock opted to hang it vertically, most likely to allow for the installation of all thirty-two canvases in the 400-square foot room. This represents another instance in which Pollock treated his paintings as " pragmatic objects, adaptable to contingencies."[237]

On the south wall, opposite *Autumn Rhythm* and also recessed under a soffit, Pollock placed his grand *Number 31, 1950* (fig. 2.13). An inch taller and two inches wider than *Autumn Rhythm* it, too, stretched from floor to ceiling, covering the entire width of the wall. Through a dense layering of brown, black, and white skeins of pigment, small sections of raw canvas occasionally break through, but visually, the painting is practically impenetrable. Its neighbor, *Number 32, 1950* extended across the gallery's broad east wall. Composed of a lighter latticework of black Duco, there are instances where the paint thickens and knots upon the unsized canvas. It, too, almost precisely covered the height and width of the gallery's east wall. In fact, for this exhibition, Pollock sought to increase the height and width of his larger paintings by

[237] Ibid., 25.

stapling the edges of the canvas directly to the painting's stretcher bars as opposed to wrapping the material around the one by three inch wood support frame. Again, his intention was to cover as much wall surface as possible. Eric Lum notes that this resulted in the paintings "acting as a replacement, a *substitute* for [the walls], as the Blake model [Ideal Museum] originally proposed," although here, with the exception of *Number 29*, they are not freestanding.[238] William Rubin had already stated as such in 1967. He noted that Pollock's work "forms a new category in which the intimacy and environment of the cabinet-size easel painting is preserved while the picture—drained of illusion—achieves the size of a mural painting *independently of that genre's social and esthetic implications.* The 'window' which has the traditional easel conception, has become the 'wall.'"[239]

"It was an Environment"

As a young artist, Allan Kaprow visited all of Pollock's exhibitions at Parsons, including the 1950 show, and made some important observations. His analysis and evaluation of the older artist's contribution to twentieth-century art appeared in "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," written in 1956, the year of Pollock's death, but not published until two years later.[240] With a focus on Pollock's large-scale canvases of the late 1940s and early 50s, Kaprow concluded that Pollock had advanced painting as far as it could go by breaking every formal, relational, and material constraint associated with traditional painting. He concluded, Pollock had brought painting into everyday life, and had done this by virtue of his canvases' very size.

"Pollock's choice of enormous canvases served many purposes," Kaprow wrote, and chief among them was their effect upon the viewer, or rather "participant," as he

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[238] Lum, "Pollock's Promise," 67 (italics in the original).
[239] William Rubin, "Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition, Part II," *Artforum* 5, no. 7 (March 1967): 36.
[240] In the mid-1950s, Kaprow was a painter looking for a way out of abstract expressionism, the predominant painting style at that time. The 1952 essay "Action Painting," in which Rosenberg stated, "The new painting has broken down every distinction between art and life," greatly affected him. Kaprow took Rosenberg's assertion literally. Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 57, no. 6 (October 1958): 24–26, 55–58. See also William Kaizen, "Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting," *Grey Room*, no. 13 (Fall 2003): 80–107.

preferred since he argued that their effect is one that is primarily experiential. With Pollock's 1950 Parsons show in mind, Kaprow stated that "the most complete and meaningful sense of his art" is conveyed through "a medium-sized exhibition space with walls covered by Pollocks," for it is at this point that Pollock's "mural-scale paintings cease to become paintings and become *environments*."[241] Certainly large paintings had been executed before, but unlike monumental, trompe l'oeil Renaissance paintings, Pollock's canvases do not convey a sense of deep space nor do they contain representational elements within them, which the viewer (or participant) can identify as an extension of the world in which they live. In fact, Pollock's large paintings move so far forward toward their surface that they extend directly into the room and out toward the viewer to confront, assault, and even suck us in. As Kaprow notes, "What I believe is clearly discernable is that the entire painting comes out at the participant right into the room."[242] Further, Pollock's paintings went beyond the literal dimensions of the frame. As Kaprow observed, "their marks surround us."[243] Pollock brought painting into everyday life and made it more experiential.

Kaprow was the first to note that Pollock's paintings so completely surrounded the viewer that they instigated not only an optical viewing experience, but also one that engaged the body. What he implied in "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," was that of a phenomenological experience in viewing the abstract expressionist artist's paintings—a more active relationship between art object and viewing subject – that would not be discussed as such until early 1960s minimalism. Kaprow extended this notion into his own field of work, which primarily concerns performance art, but its legacy also extends into Minimalist art of the 1960s where the work of Donald Judd or Robert Morris has

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[241] Kaprow, "Legacy," 56. Ten years later, in "Jackson Pollock: An Artist's Symposium," Kaprow would specifically cite the 1950 show at Parsons: "When his all-over canvases were shown at Betty Parsons's gallery around 1950, with four windowless walls nearly covered, the effect was that of an overwhelming *environment* . . ." (italics in the original). Kaprow, "Jackson Pollock: An Artist's Symposium," *Art News* 66, no. 3 (May 1967): 26–29, 66–67, 69–72.
[242] Kaprow, "Legacy," 56.
[243] Ibid.

also been described as “confrontational,” but more importantly, the viewer interacts with the art object on a more phenomenological level.

CHAPTER THREE

Tony Smith: Architect Amongst Painters

> *My initials are A.P.S. I used to kid about their meaning Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture. But I wasn't kidding too much; it really felt that way.* —Tony Smith, 1966 [1]

Tony Smith was an enigmatic figure in the postwar art world, a twentieth-century Renaissance man, an architect, painter, and, during the last two decades of his life, sculptor. During the twenty years that Smith worked as an architecture designer, he produced some fifteen buildings, perhaps twice as many unbuilt projects, and made approximately one hundred paintings, as well as hundreds of sketches and drawings that were independent of his building projects. In 1966, when he was finally given his first solo exhibition, it did not include any of his paintings, drawings, or architectural designs, but only his recent sculpture.[2] The reductive, black-painted, often monumental forms appeared to correspond with Minimalism and caused a number of distinguished curators and writers to embrace him as a Minimalist, which he was not.[3] At the time of the exhibition, the influential curator Samuel Wagstaff described Smith as "one of the best known unknowns in American art."[4] *Time* magazine featured him on their cover and

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[1] Tony Smith in undated note, Tony Smith Estate Archives, New York (hereafter cited as TSEA).
[2] There were two exhibition held at two separate venues, but organized by one curator, Samuel Wagstaff: *Tony Smith: Two Exhibitions of Sculpture*, Hartford, Connecticut, Wadsworth Atheneum, November 8–December 31, 1966; Philadelphia, The Institute of Contemporary Art, November 22, 1966–January 6, 1967.
[3] Smith did not consider himself a Minimalist and vehemently opposed any such label being attached to his work. From the onset, he distinguished his work from that of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, and other artists who he showed with in the now famous "Primary Structures" exhibition held at the Jewish Museum in 1967. A year later he stated: "The main difference in approach, as I understand it, is that the Minimalists are aiming at certain (preconceived) results, while my work [sculpture] is the product of a variety of processes, which are not governed by conscious goals." Tony Smith quoted in Renée Sabatello Neu, *Tony Smith* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), n.p.
[4] Sam Wagstaff, "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* 5, no. 4 (December 1966): 15.

weighed in with a harsher assessment: "Until two years ago, Tony Smith . . . was known, if at all, in Manhattan art circles as a minor architect and Sunday painter of geometric abstractions."[5] Even the more recent critical attention paid Smith contributes to this misconception. Robert Storr writes that "Smith was the late-bloomer, coming into his own after Abstract Expressionism had peaked as a movement, and several of its leading lights, Pollock for one, had vanished from the scene."[6] While the 1960s generation acted as if Smith was their new discovery, he was hardly unknown during the 1940s and 50s, which is when he not only produced his best work as architect, but befriended the leading postwar painters (not sculptors), becoming especially close with Pollock and Newman at a time when they were making their most important paintings. And he wasn't making sculpture at this time, but painting as well as designing and building some of his best works as architect. As Gene Baro rightly pointed out: "The fact is that [Smith's] reputation, which dates from the mid-1940s, was not underground at all where it counted, among the artists who were his peers."[7] In fact, as architect, painter, peer, confidant, and loyal friend, Smith was a significant force as Pollock and Newman moved easel painting closer towards its demise. He also sought to synthesize their two-dimensional, abstract, planar paintings within his three-dimensional architectural work.

Tony Smith was a respected and influential figure during the 1940s and 50s, yet historians have largely omitted him from their studies on Abstract Expressionist art. He occasionally appears in the biographies or oral histories on Pollock and less frequently in the literature on Newman although these are the two artists to whom he was closest and whose work he impacted in many ways. Over the past thirty years, only two monographs on the artist have been produced: the first, published in 1972 during the artist's lifetime, consists of reprints of Lucy Lippard's exhibition reviews that appeared in *Art*

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[5] Hayden Herrera, "Sculpture, Master of the Monumentalists," *Time* 90, no. 15 (October 13, 1967): 83.
[6] Robert Storr, "A Man of Parts," in *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 11.
[7] Gene Baro, "Tony Smith: Toward Speculation in Pure Form," *Art International* 11, no. 6 (Summer 1967): 28.

International in 1967 and 1968. Lippard does not attend to Smith's architecture and devotes a single paragraph to his painting. The second publication is a photographic essay of Smith's sculpture published by Matthew Marks Gallery in 2007.[8] Of the dozen or so exhibition catalogues, the majority pertain to his sculpture, a few focus on his paintings and drawings, and none attend to his architecture, with the exception of the Museum of Modern Art's 1996 exhibition catalogue produced to accompany Smith's posthumous retrospective. In fact, Smith's work had never been presented in such thorough manner until the MoMA exhibition where, according to one critic, "the body of work and the artistic sensibility underlying it proved to be more complex and harder to grasp than most people had realized."[9]

To this body of literature, one can add Joan Pachner's 1993 unpublished dissertation, "Tony Smith: Architect, Sculptor, Painter," which is the first in-depth study of Smith's entire artistic production.[10] To date, no one has fully considered Smith's architecture, least of all in relationship to the abstract expressionists. This chapter on Smith is based on previously unexamined material located in the artist's archives, which include his letters, architectural drawings, models, informal sketches, and gallery designs. These primary sources reveal how Smith continually sought to integrate the paintings of those artists he was closest to in the 1940s and 50s and whose work he admired most—Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still—within his architectural designs. Smith provided an important link between the abstract expressionists and modern architecture, which proves him to be the abstract expressionists' architect.

"Considered an Equal"

Smith, born in 1912, the same year as Pollock, fits squarely within the generation of the abstract expressionists, who for the most part, were all born between 1903 and 1915.

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[8] *Tony Smith*: *Not an Object, Not a Monument* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 2007).
[9] Richard Kalina, "Building Form*," Art in America* 47, no. 3 (March 1999): 80
[10] Joan Pachner, "Tony Smith: Architect, Sculptor, Painter" (Ph.D dissertation, New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, 1993).

He initially wanted to be a painter. Like many of his colleagues, he studied at the artist-run Art Students League in New York, where he took evening sketch classes beginning in 1932 and studied drawing and painting from 1934 through 1936.[11] There he met fellow students Pollock and David Smith; Newman and Adolph Gottlieb had also recently taken classes there.[12] Smith studied with George Grosz and George Bridgeman, but the teacher who had the most definitive and lasting effect on him was the Czech modernist Vaclav Vytlacil, who lectured on the structural aspects of modern art. His teachings would manifest not only in Smith's paintings, but his architecture and sculpture as well.

In 1937 Smith left New York for Chicago's newly opened New Bauhaus, a descendant of the influential German Bauhaus design school that dissolved in 1933 under National Socialist pressure. As one amongst the first thirty-five students who inaugurated the school, Smith hoped to study modernist design and architecture under the tutelage of László Moholy-Nagy, yet as we shall see, he was greatly disappointed by both the faculty and curriculum. Over the next few years, Smith returned to New York intermittently while overseeing the construction of houses he had designed in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington and studying with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin in Wisconsin.[13] He never earned a degree in architecture let alone a license to practice, although this did not prevent him from realizing his architectural designs.[14] The early 1940s were spent in California where his new wife, Jane, pursued a career in acting. Among other things, he

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[11] Simultaneous to studying at the Art Students League, Smith also worked for his grandfather, who manufactured waterworks in nearby Orange, New Jersey. The A.P. Smith Manufacturing Company specialized in the manufacturer of fire hydrants, many of which can still be found throughout Lower Manhattan. Smith's work at the A.P. Smith factory influenced his sense of form as concerns his later architecture and sculpture as well as the latter's means of production.

[12] Newman took drawing classes six days a week at the Art Students League beginning in 1923; Gottlieb was enrolled from 1920–21, and again in 1923 following a year in Europe.

[13] As Neil Levine notes, Tony Smith forms a direct link between Taliesen and the New York School. This may be the only book on Wright that mentions Smith, albeit in a footnote. Neil Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 478n84.

[14] Smith's formal studies never resulted in degree beyond high school. As John Keenen points out, Smith's architectural guides including Buckminster Fuller, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier similarly lacked a formal architectural training. Keenen, "Architecture," in *Tony Smith*, 1998, 37.

worked for the Viennese furniture designer, Paul Frankl, whose studies as an architect informed his well-known line of Skyscraper furniture. Smith would have appreciated Frankl's aesthetic, which derived from the European avant-garde yet affirmed American values and ideals. In 1945 Smith settled down in New York. His return coincided with the rise of what would come to be known as abstract expressionism, with which he was actively involved during its most important years, 1945–1952. In the summer of 1945 he met Newman and his wife, Annalee, in Provincetown while building a painting studio for Fritz Bultman. The next year he met Mark Rothko as well as Theodoros Stamos, for whom he soon designed and constructed a house and later drafted plans for a chapel.

It should be noted that in the 1940s and 50s there was a general divide in New York between the "uptown" and "downtown" artists. Smith did not fit as comfortably into the downtown scene where Eighth Street artists such as Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline considered him snobbish. In their eyes, Smith belonged to the uptown art world, generally thought of as more intellectual, which included Newman, Rothko, and Robert Motherwell. As far as Smith was concerned, the feeling was somewhat mutual. He didn't like de Kooning's work, especially his "Women" exhibition at Sidney Janis Gallery and "put it down" because he felt it too European i.e. representational.[15] Pollock, however, straddled both worlds and Smith became especially close to him in the late 1940s after Pollock asked for help installing one of his shows at Parsons. Smith had already helped Newman install Parsons's first show, "Northwest Coast Indians," and he continued designing and installing exhibitions for Betty Parsons into the early 1950s. It was also at this time that Smith began to direct the Friday night lecture series at 35 East Eighth Street, better known as Studio 35, located in Greenwich Village, which was an extension of "The Subjects of the Artist" school run by William Baziotes, Rothko, Newman, and

[15] Smith is referring to "Willem de Kooning: Paintings on the Theme of the Woman," New York, Sidney Janis Gallery, March–April 1953. Tony Smith, interview with Paul Cummings, 22 August 1978, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art (hereafter cited as AAA); copy of transcript at TSEA.

David Hare. "Studio 35" became best known for its three-day conference in April 1950 dedicated to defining the movement that would become abstract expressionism.[16]

Within less than a decade after his return to New York, Smith had become close to the most important artists of that time—he could count Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Still, and Ad Reinhardt as friends, confidants, and colleagues. And unique among his peers, Smith maintained lifelong friendships with each and every one of these artists. This is remarkable considering that by the mid-1950s, when many of these artists began to receive greater recognition and critical attention, they became competitive with one another and began to quarrel, which resulted in quite a few severed friendships. Dorothy Miller, the MoMA curator who organized "Fifteen Americans," the first museum show of the abstract expressionists, recalled that the artists were all great friends when she organized the exhibition but within a year afterwards were all quarreling.[17] Smith felt that "the first real bitterness surfaced after Pollock's death, when his prices suddenly jumped" and he described the subsequent squabbles as "asinine, petty, and incomprehensible."[18] Betty Parsons, who represented many of these artists, watched several of her artists' friendships devolve "from love to hate."[19] Looking back on an especially fraught disagreement between Newman and Reinhardt, she commented, "If they'd had duels then, Barney would have killed [Ad]."[20] Rothko and Newman "drifted apart" after the "Fifteen Americans" show because Newman felt that Rothko and Still did not push for him to be included in the important exhibition.

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[16] The conference was entitled "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35" and was moderated by Alfred Barr, Director of Collections at the Museum of Modern Art. Names for the abstract art movement included "Abstract-Expressionist," "Abstract-Symbolist," and "Abstract-Objectionist." An edited transcript of the conference was published in *Modern Artists in America*, eds. Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt (New York: Wittenborn Shultz, 1951).

[17] Dorothy Miller, interview by Calvin Tomkins, September 18, 1974, Calvin Tomkins Papers, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (hereafter cited as MoMA Archives).

[18] Tony Smith, interview by Calvin Tomkins, October 9, 1974, Tomkins Papers, MoMA Archives, 3.

[19] Betty Parsons, interview by Gerald Silk, June 11, 1981, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as AAA).

[20] Betty Parsons, interview by Calvin Tomkins, late 1970s, Tomkins Papers, MoMA Archives.

But through it all, Smith remained a steady friend of all and kept in close contact even during the years he spent in Germany (1953–55) where his wife was engaged as an opera singer. Smith introduced Pollock to the Japanese paper that he subsequently used to make his black-and-white drawings, defended Rothko with a letter to *Time Magazine* in 1955, and designed Barnett Newman's headstone when he died. Smith remained their ally, who, because he was primarily known as an architect, was not perceived as a competitor.[21] They respected Smith and the feeling was mutual. In the late 1960s he stated, "I identify with three living artists: Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still. I don't claim to be their equal, only to share the ideals they have in common and to attempt to emulate their nobility."[22] Had Pollock been alive, he certainly would have included him, too. With this statement, Smith displayed his characteristic self-deprecation, although his friend held him in higher esteem (fig. 3.1). According to Lucy Lippard, who not only knew Smith but many artists of his generation, "[Smith] has been, since the 1940s, a respected friend and colleague of Newman, Still, Rothko, and Pollock, considered an equal (but happily for his personal relationships, not a rival) by the leaders of the abstract expressionist generation."[23] Bill Agee described Smith as a mentor to Pollock, Newman, and Rothko, claiming, "his presence was invaluable to their development."[24]

That Smith never attained the same amount of recognition during the 1940s and 50s as his more luminous contemporaries is due to a number of reasons, but least of all because of the quality of his work. First, while Smith made over a hundred paintings and hundreds of sketches during the postwar period, he chose not to exhibit them, most likely because he felt intimidated. The fact that Smith did not work on the Federal Arts Project of the Work Projects Administration may also have contributed to his lack of recognition

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[21] Even so, Smith was not immune from their competitiveness. Rothko, Smith recalled, had such enormous vanity that when hearing that Smith admired a painting of Pollock's, he demanded: "I thought you were committed to me." Smith, Tomkins interview, MoMA Archives, 3.
[22] Pachner, "Tony Smith," 1993, 170.
[23] Lucy Lippard, *Tony Smith* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1972), 8.
[24] Bill Agee, "Tony Smith and His Times," in *Tracing Tony Smith's Tau* (New York: Hunter College Art Galleries, 2004), 11.

as a painter.[25] Newman, who was also ineligible for the WPA (due to his employment as a teacher at City College), later recalled that he paid "a severe price for not being on the project with the other guys; in their eyes I wasn't a painter; I didn't have the label."[26] Smith also shunned publicity. When Pollock first met the collector (and, later, his biographer) B.H. Friedman in the spring of 1955, he asked Friedman if he knew Tony Smith's architecture. Friedman, who was a real estate executive at the time, told him, "I read the architecture magazines. I don't remember seeing his name." Pollock explained to Friedman, "That's because he won't let them reproduce his work."[27] Further, Smith was somewhat shy. Writing from Germany in 1954 to Newman, with whom he had become very close, he confessed to not making many friends overseas: "I don't suppose I have ever had anything much to do with people in general anywhere. Outside of our friends I never knew anyone or had any way of contacting anyone, and it is the same here."[28]

Tony Smith as Painter

> *Painting is the inspiration and model for architecture; it is the painter who is the visionary.*
>
> —Tony Smith, 1949[29]

Smith's original ambition was to be a painter, and painting was the one medium that he returned to over and over again throughout his life.[30] This may explain why, in the

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[25] Smith told Paul Cummings that his father was "head of the W.P.A. when Gorky did the airport murals in Newark [1936]," thus he was not ineligible to participate. Smith, Cummings interview, TSEA.

[26] Newman in Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 88.

[27] B.H. Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972), xvii. A comparable architect is Bruce Goff who Smith also admired. Similarly, Goff never designed with the intent that his work would be published in magazines or to be fashionable.

[28] Tony Smith, letter to Barnett Newman, February 25, 1954, in Barnett Newman Foundation Archives (hereafter cited as BNFA).

[29] As recorded by Elizabeth A. Trumbower in her class notes from "Visual Arts and Contemporary Culture," taught by Tony Smith at New York University, School of Education, spring 1949, TSEA.

1940s and 50s, he responded more to the work of Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still than he did to sculpture. In his writings, notes, and interviews there is no mention of the leading sculptors of that time such as David Smith, David Hare, Jacques Lipchitz, or Ibram Lassaw. George Segal, a student of Smith's in 1949 at New York University, recalled, "Tony was an architect who was in love with the new painting. He would walk down the halls with a Rothko under his arm to show us what the new painting looked like."[31] Although Smith never had much money, in the late 1940s, when his grandfather left him a small inheritance, he used to acquire a selection of his friends' work. He only purchased paintings. They included Newman's recently completed *Onement II* (1948), Still's *Number 5* (1951), Rothko's *No. 19* (1948–49), and Pollock's *Number 9* (1949).[32] Smith was not only proud of his collection, but he also felt a deep connection to the work of these artists. In a late interview, he told Paul Cummings, "I'm not saying that to own something is the same thing as to be related to it, but it happened I was so related to these things that I was the first who owned Pollock, Rothko, Newman and Still, and who I always contended were the greatest painters of their time."[33]

What was it that Smith related to in the work of these four artists in particular, and why was their influence so important for his architectural designs? In the late 1960s Gene

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[30] Smith completed more than three hundred paintings over the course of his career as architect, painter, and sculptor.

[31] George Segal, August 12, 1997, in "Writing, Interviews, and Letters," in Storr, *Tony Smith,* 1998, 191. At the time, Segal, who is best known for his sculpture, was studying painting. Smith taught a class on "Visual Arts in Contemporary Culture" and a course on Industrial Design at New York University's School of Education. Altogether, Smith taught at four different New York institutions between 1946 and 1953, when he left to live in Germany. This includes a settlement house, Hartley House, where he taught painting to children from September 1946–May 1951; a class in two-dimensional design at Pratt Institute from February through May 1951; New York University's School of Education from 1946–1950 where his students also included Alfred Leslie and Larry Rivers; and from September 1950 through January 1953, he taught architecture at Cooper Union.

[32] Smith told Paul Cummings, "I bought the first Newman with a stripe in it [*Onement II*] except the one that he has, or the one that he had [*Onement I*, 1948]. I own the first one he did with two stripes." Smith kept the painting until 1967 when he gifted his collection to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, which was also the first museum to exhibit his work. Smith, Cummings interview, 1978, TSEA.

[33] Ibid.

Baro pointed out, "The painters who interested Smith in the 1940s were concerned with pictorial structure more than they were with expression: Pollock yes, Gorky no."[34] A remark that Smith made to James Valliere supports this. He told the interviewer that he didn't like Pollock's early work, specifically citing *The Flame* (1934–38), which he first saw in 1942–43 at the Pepsi-Cola sponsored "Artists for Victory" exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[35] Smith claimed that the painting was "too tight and oppressive" and that it gave him a feeling of claustrophobia.[36] *The Flame* is a highly worked painting that feels tightly wound with a recessionary depth so forceful that it sucks the viewer's gaze directly into its vortex. The whirling fluidity within Pollock's conflagration is characteristic of Benton's style, yet its palette and stylized forms are also in line with the emotionally charged work of José Clement Orozco, such as his *Man of Fire* (1938–39), which *The Flame*, oddly, appears to anticipate. Pollock's early painting is, indeed, expressive, and while it may be difficult to think of Pollock's late 1940s/early 1950s work as non-expressive, when Baro describes the mature work as "structural," he is likely referring to the allover application of paint, which does convey a sense of regularity or even uniformity, despite the variety in size and color of his puddles and skeins. Perhaps even more, it established the picture plane as effectively unbroken and co-existent with the surface.

Similarly, Smith told Irving Sandler that he "didn't respond to [Newman's] work until he painted absolute field."[37] The only pre- "absolute field" paintings that Smith would have seen were Newman's surrealist-influenced drawings and paintings of the 1940s, which frequently featured visually emotive forms suggestive of otherworldliness. *Death of Euclid*, for example, is an eerie, atmospheric painting with a hovering black on white circle that suggests a primordial solar eclipse. Instead, Smith more readily related

[34] Tony Smith in Gene Baro, "Tony Smith: Toward Speculation in Pure Form," *Art International,* no. 11 (Summer 1967): 28.
[35] December 7, 1942–February 22, 1943.
[36] Tony Smith in James Valliere, "Interview with Tony Smith," August 23, 1965, TSEA.
[37] Tony Smith, interview notes by Irving Sandler, Irving Sandler Papers, Getty Research Library, Los Angeles.

to Newman's reductive paintings of the post-1948 period that contained no forms that could be interpreted as representational or emotive but were more philosophically or metaphysically informed. Void of expressive brushwork, they are done in pure, flat color with vertical bands that define the spatial structure of the painting whilst simultaneously dividing and uniting the composition. The bands—or "zips," as Newman decided to call them in the mid-1960s—may have resonated with Smith, who was continually investigating the relationship or tension between solid and void, full and empty, inside and outside space. He referred to this as the "continuum" and the concept appears frequently in his writings.

Smith's predilection for structural painting can be traced to his early influences. They begin with Vaclav Vytlacil, with whom he studied with at the Art Students League in from 1935 to 1937.[38] Vytlacil championed abstract art at a time when the majority of the League's instructors focused largely on representational painting. His lectures on cubism incited Thomas Hart Benton, Reginald Marsh, and other instructors to protest; yet the students responded favorably. Vytlacil, whose work came out of Paul Cézanne, his direct study with Hans Hofmann, and his interest in cubism, emphasized painting's structural aspects.[39] While teaching at the Art Students League, Vytlacil made paintings of biomorphic and geometric shapes that he placed within carefully planned out, rationalized compositions.

In addition to Vytlacil, Smith was also drawn to the analytic cubism of Juan Gris and George Braque, Georges Vantongerloo's geometric abstraction, Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist works, and Amédée Ozenfant's Purist paintings. Smith, in short, responded to the work of those artists who favored geometric form organized within a grid-like structure, as opposed to gestural and emotionally expressive content. Smith's early paintings were often representational, such as a still life with jug and fruit, yet they are

[38] A registration card in the Vaclav Vytlacil files at the Art Students League gives Smith's attendance dates at the League as September 16, 1935–October 1, 1937. The New Bauhaus began its classes on October 18, 1937. Vaclav Vytlacil files, Art Students League Archives, New York.
[39] For Vytlacil's students and classes at the Art Students League, see "Interview with George McNeil by Irving Sandler, 1968,"*Archives of American Art Journal* 13, no. 2 (1973): 1–2.

not what one might call “expressive” of any idea, emotion, or impression. Instead, they are meditations on reductive geometry achieved through a synthesis of cubism, Constructivism, and De Stijl. In his paintings, as in his architectural designs and sculpture, Smith favored structural regularity, repeated elements or modules, and he was especially interested in the interaction between positive and negative spaces. Further, Smith, like many artists of his time, disliked the decorative—the extraneous, the excessive, the unnecessary—which is why he was drawn to the sparsity or paring down that he observed in the work of his colleagues, specifically Pollock and Newman, but also a feature of modernist architecture with its simplification of form and the elimination of ornament.

Smith as Architect

Smith’s father was a practical-minded man who convinced his son that he could better support himself as an architect than a painter. The Museum of Modern Art’s 1932 "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition" also fueled Smith’s decision to pursue architecture. The point of the show was to define modern architecture’s style at that time. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson identified the modern style by its radical simplification of form, uninflected surfaces absent of decoration or ornamentation, sleek lines, white walls, honest expression of structure, and logical design. The show included models and drawings of Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye, Poissy-sur-Seine (1930); Gropius’s Bauhaus School, Dessau (1926); and Mies van der Rohe’s German pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition (1929), to cite just a few examples they thought best represented these ideals. Smith was quite taken by their work and recorded his response to the exhibition:

> Needless to say I was thrilled when in 1932 the Museum of Modern Art showed the work of Corbusier, van der Rohe, Gropius, Oud and Wright. Here was an architecture of structural regularity, instead of symmetry,

volume rather than mass, of straight forward use of materials instead of ornament, and of a free, functional development of plan.[40]

Although Smith was at first greatly impressed with the modern style of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, it was not until after 1945 that he began to emulate their work. Instead, Frank Lloyd Wright, who had only a cameo appearance in the exhibition's catalogue because he was thought not to have kept up with more recent developments, was Smith's first architectural influence. Yet some of Smith's most important projects, including the unrealized 1951 church he planned with Pollock, exhibit a fusion of Wright's, Le Corbusier's, and Mies's ideas.

In 1937, a few years after MoMA's International Style exhibition, Smith enrolled at the newly opened New Bauhaus in Chicago. He felt that if he wanted to design like Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe, the New Bauhaus would be the place to learn.[41] He also understood the New Bauhaus to be as much a school of painting as of architecture. Unfortunately, he was wrong on both accounts and he gained little if any architectural training. In fact, Smith never became a licensed architect and had his brother Thomas, who studied with Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology sign his architectural drawings. Another disappointed student, Fritz Bultman, later described the New Bauhaus as "anti-painting."[42] László Moholy-Nagy, who headed the program, was far more interested in exploring the sciences than adopting the curriculum Walter Gropius had developed for the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau. The school closed less than a year after its opening due to a withdrawal of funding and dissidence amongst the students,

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[40] Tony Smith in undated, handwritten autobiography, TSEA. Also in Pachner, "Tony Smith," 1996, 66.

[41] The New Bauhaus opened in October 1937 and closed less than a year later. Smith always felt that he played a part in its closing since he and his friends made known how dispirited they were with the appointment of Chicagoan George Fred Keck as architecture instructor when they favored someone with a more international reputation such as Walter Gropius. In 1939 the school became the Chicago Institute of Design and later, in 1949, part of the new Illinois Institute of Technology university system. See Smith, Cummings interview, TSEA.

[42] Fritz Bultman in Evan R. Firestone, "Fritz Bultman The Case of the Missing 'Irascible,'" *Archives of American Art Journal* 32, no. 2 (1994): 12.

many of whom felt the curriculum stressed the technical over the fine arts. While there, Smith studied with György Kepes, a close friend of Marcel Breuer of the original Bauhaus. Smith's education at the New Bauhaus, albeit brief, may have sparked his interest in merging painting with architecture, given that the ideological premise of the original Weimar-Dessau-Berlin Bauhaus was to break down barriers and hierarchies between craft, industrial arts, and fine arts. But just as importantly, it was at the New Bauhaus that Smith befriended a number of artists who become lifelong friends as well as future clients for his architectural projects.

In January 1938, Smith came across a special issue of *Architectural Forum* devoted to the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, which featured photographs of the master architect's recent projects as well as his philosophical writings.[43] He was greatly impressed. Soon after, Smith began a two-year affiliation with Wright who, as his first architectural mentor, informed Smith's thinking about integrating painting and architecture. The skills Smith had acquired while working at his grandfather's fire hydrant manufacturing company earned him a variety of odd jobs on Wright projects. He first served as a carpenter's assistant and bricklayer on the Suntop Houses project in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, then as a construction calculator for Usonian homes in upstate New York. He next spent a brief but influential five months at Taliesin where he worked as an architectural draftsman while further schooled in Wright's approach to design and building. Smith later said: "It wasn't so much that I was that enthralled by his architectural ideas because . . . I was more interested in European architecture before I came in contact with Wright . . .. I think more than anything . . . [Wright] just helped me integrate an awful lot that with Mies, or Le Corbusier, or Gropius I would have thought of as some kind of conscious and rational point of view . . . It was more like being pulled

[43] This was the first comprehensive treatment of Wright's work in an American architectural journal since 1908. As Anthony Alofsin notes, the publication of Wright's ideas in architectural journals proved a powerful way of informing a more general, middle class public of his accomplishments and served to establish him as the "undisputed American master of modern architecture." Anthony Alofsin, "Frank Lloyd Wright and Modernism," in *Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect*, ed. Terence Riley (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 47.

together."[44] Some of Smith's most important projects, including the unrealized 1951 church project with Pollock, would exhibit a fusion of Wright's, Le Corbusier's, and Mies's ideas.

Like Wright, Buckminster Fuller, Mies, and Le Corbusier, Smith lacked a formal education as an architect. In 1940, following his fellowship at Taliesin, Smith traveled to Columbus, Ohio, where he realized his first private houses in which he incorporated many of Wright's design principles. But by1945, he was back on the East Coast where he undertook projects more uniquely his own.[45] He built homes and studios primarily for those involved in the art world: artists, collectors, art dealers, and patrons of the arts. His first commission was a studio that he designed and helped build in Provincetown for the painter Fritz Bultman, who he had met at the New Bauhaus. Set upon an embankment, the structure features a sloping roof and canted walls that flare upward to a high skylight. From the side, the studio resembles a trapezoid and was recently described as "a Tony Smith sculpture not unlike some of his monumental, black painted constructions, but this one's for working in: a sculpture housing a painter."[46] However, Bultman, who was primarily an easel painter, found the studio's voluminous interior overwhelming and better suited for the large-sized canvases that so many artists were engaged with during the late 1940s and early 50s (fig. 3.2). He soon rented it out to Hans Hofmann's School of Art and settled into a smaller shed, where he ended up working until the early 1960s.[47] As the architect John Keenen notes, the studio's ceiling height gives the interior space an ecclesiastical quality, something more along the lines of a chapel, and, in fact, Smith would later design a chapel for the Bultmans. But it is the Bultman studio that is the first example of Smith merging his idea for a studio design with that of a chapel, which would

[44] Smith, Cummings interview, TSEA.
[45] He completed seven Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired homes in Black Lick, Ohio (1940) and a private house for his father-in-law, L.L. Brotherton, in Mt. Vernon, Washington, which he based on Wright's hexagonal grid (1944). For plans and photographs of the Brotherton House, see Keenen, "Architecture," *Tony Smith*, 1998, 51–52.
[46] Michael Mazur, "Ghosts," in *The Provincetown Studio Show* (Provincetown: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, August 2008), n.p.
[47] Pachner, "Tony Smith," 1993, 84.

ultimately morph into a place of exhibition for pictures. For Smith, the progression represented an arc of his architectural continuum.

In 1951, as Pollock was making some of his largest and most important paintings, Newman was investigating the "zip," and Rothko was fully engaged with his sectionals, Smith embarked on the most significant architectural projects of his career. In June of that year he designed and helped build a home for another friend and fellow artist, Theodoros Stamos. Stamos showed at Betty Parsons Gallery and was the youngest of the fifteen so-called "Irascibles." Located on the North Fork of Long Island, not far from Springs, the construction of his new home was an artists' affair: Pollock and Bradley Walker Tomlin (another of the "Irascibles") helped lay the batter boards for the boundaries of the house. Thomas Chimes, a Philadelphia painter who befriended Smith, Newman, Stamos, and others at the Art Students League, helped install the skylight. Smith based the design of the house on a hexagon, which he raised off the ground by placing it upon crisscrossed trusses similar to Le Corbusier's *pilotis* (fig. 3.3). The hexagon derived from Wright's Hanna House (1936), the domes of R. Buckminster Fuller, and the crystalline structures illustrated in D'Arcy Thompson's *On Growth and Form*, a study that focused on the generation of natural forms. First published in 1917, Thompson's book was popular amongst many artists at that time.[48] The hexagon remained an important building module for Smith. He would soon take the isolated cell he used for the Stamos' house and fashion it into an exhibition tent. The hexagon proved to be not only a flexible design component, but it also would prove a useful shape for showing large-scale paintings.

Modular forms and with it their inherent flexibility define Smith's architecture as well as his painting and architecture. Little known is the fact that Smith's work was also

[48] First published in 1917, Thompson's book was reissued in 1942. Smith gave a copy to Pollock who especially appreciated its photographs and illustrations. The new edition included a number of Harold Edgerton's now famous instantaneous photographs, including one of a splash of milk as its frontispiece. A number of scholars have connected Edgerton's "splash" photograph with Pollock's style of painting. See Kenneth Hayes, *Milk and Melancholy* (London: The MIT Press, 2008).

greatly informed by Albert Farwell Bemis, a visionary somewhat along the lines of Buckminster Fuller who in the 1920s investigated ways to meet the demands of the post-World War I housing boom. Bemis proposed and advanced a "cubical modular" design that provided a flexible yet systematic way of building. In his book, *Rational Design*, he discussed how the creative use of stock modules could allow for the fast, efficient, and economical production of mass-market homes. Smith, too, favored structural regularity in his work, which included the repetition of forms such as the hexagon, the trapezoid, and modular fenestration.

The Wright Direction: Stone House Mural

> *Sculptors and painters ask me: "What place has sculpture and painting in your building?" I reply: "My buildings are painting and sculpture. But painting and sculpture that is architecture could enter where I am compelled to leave off for want of more highly specialized technique*."
> —Frank Lloyd Wright, 1938[49]

In the mid-1940s, while Smith was working on a Usonian house in Bernardsville, New Jersey, nearby neighbors Henry and Betty Stone asked the young architect if he would design an addition to the rudimentary, box-shaped house they had constructed for themselves some years earlier. Smith's "addition" transformed the house into an entirely different entity, for he not only incorporated several new structures, but he also produced a mural, which is one of his largest paintings, yet is little known and has received scant critical attention.[50] Smith began work on the mural sometime in 1949, at a point when his friendship with Pollock had become quite close and simultaneous to the emergence of Pollock's large-sized drip/pour paintings. The importance of Smith's *Mural* lies in the fact that it is one of his largest paintings, but it also exemplifies how Smith envisioned abstract painting and modernist architecture coexisting as an integrated whole. It could be

[49] Frank Lloyd Wright, "Perspective and Plan of Chapel Memorial 'To the Pioneer,'" *Architectural Forum,* no. 68 (January 1938): 34.
[50] See Betty Stone, "History of the Bernardsville, NJ, House of Mr. & Mrs. Henry A. Stone, Jr.," October 28, 1996, curatorial files, Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey.

said that on this occasion Smith achieved what Wright could not, for the painter ultimately possessed the "more highly specialized technique" that Wright claimed to lack.

Smith designed a series of low-lying rectangular structures for the Stones that he capped with a flat roof, broad overhang, and bands of casement windows. Sited upon a grassy slope and built in wood, glass, and concrete block, the house merged with the surrounding landscape and was reminiscent of one of Wright's Prairie houses (fig. 3.4). Smith treated the structure and the land as a single work of art, at one point carefully placing boulders around the swimming pool as if they were sculpture.

As a finishing touch, Smith embarked upon a wall-size mural for the home's front entranceway that is similar in size, scale, and style to what Pollock had completed four years earlier for Peggy Guggenheim's new residence.[51] Like Pollock's, it was sited for the home's front foyer. Also like Pollock's *Mural*, Smith's *Mural*, technically speaking, is not a mural at all, for rather than painting directly on the wall, Smith executed it on four individual Masonite panels, measuring approximately eight by thirteen feet overall, which made the painting completely portable.[52] This aspect of portability recalls Pollock's statement in his 1948 Guggenheim Fellowship application about wanting to make large, "moveable" pictures, which was nearly contemporaneous with Smith's preparatory sketches for the Stones.

While Smith rarely worked on a large scale, he, like Pollock, was affected by the Mexican muralists' achievements. As he later told curator Sam Wagstaff: "I'm temperamentally more inclined to mural painting, especially that of the Mexican, Orozco.

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[51] Although the mural is undated, Smith made preparatory drawings for the painting in a notebook (located TSEA) that Joan Pachner dates from 1949. Further, Cary Stone, Henry and Betty Stone's eldest daughter, believes that she was seven or eight years old at the time when Smith was working on the mural, which places it between 1949 and 1950. Cary Stone, email message to author, December 15, 2008.

[52] Alongside preparatory sketches that Smith made while working out his ideas for the Stone House Mural, he noted, "Pollock's Cutouts." It was at this time that Pollock was working on Masonite to fabricate his cutout paintings, such as *Out of the Web: Number 7, 1949.* Although Smith's "Mural" does not resemble Pollock's cutouts, he obviously had them in mind while developing his "Mural for Stone House" studies. He also wrote down "Matisse Cutouts," which leads Joan Pachner to believe that Smith was referencing *Jazz,* Matisse's limited edition book of prints published in 1947, a copy of which Smith owned and cherished.

I like the way a huge area holds on to a surface in the same way a state does on a map."[53] Interestingly, in its painterliness, vivid palette, and interlocking abstract forms, Smith's *Mural* seems to anticipate Jasper Johns's Map paintings, a motif Johns relied on throughout his career because it emphasized the canvas's two-dimensionality (fig. 3.5). Smith's interest in maintaining flatness is substantiated by his later comment to Lucy Lippard: "I think my interest in painting remains that of dealing with the interchange of figure and ground. . . . I am mainly involved with trying to make an equilibrium over the surface based on fairly close values. . . . I think that goes partly with my dislike of fragmentation, of busyness and disturbing overlays of speed and noise."[54]

As one might expect, Smith's *Mural* reflects the painting of his contemporaries. Done in acrylic house paint, *Mural* represents a pastiche of styles being practiced by his friends in the late 1940s. It incorporates instances of Pollock's "drip" and metallic silver paint, a technique and material that Pollock had begun to employ quite regularly by 1947–48. Smith's composition consists of interlocking, ascending and/or descending jagged configurations that evoke Clyfford Still's "crags," which Still had begun in 1944. Some sections, however, are softer and suggest the billowiness of Rothko's 1947–49 Multiforms. Foremost in its allegiance to abstract expressionism is Smith's treatment of surface and space. Smith distributed the painting's internal components across the Masonite surface in its entirety, yet his handling of surface is less intuitive and more that of an architect who designs a structure before building it. Smith's method is systematic, as if he used a template, even if somewhat loosely, in planning out the mural's composition.

Smith would perfect this systematized approach to the painting's surface with his Louisenberg series (named after a geological site near Bayreuth), which he completed between 1953–55, while living in Germany. He began the series by executing twenty-seven drawings on graph paper of circles and peanut-shaped modules placed within an

[53] Smith in Wagstaff, "Talking with Tony Smith," 18.
[54] Smith in Lucy Lippard, "Tony Smith: Talk About Sculpture," *Art News,* no. 70 (April 1971): 68.

assortment of rectangles and squares. Smith planned to enlarge the individual arrangements of modules and paint them on interrelated panels.[55] Here, too, Smith's intention was to integrate his painting with architecture. He envisioned the panels hung individually throughout a single building. The panels would have been visually connected to one another and the experience of viewing them as processional, which would have resulted in a visual continuum in the architectural space. Writing to Ad Reinhardt in 1954, he explained that the planning of the Louisenberg paintings was "done from a more or less architectural point of view, closer to billboards perhaps than to easel pictures, but not being exactly what one would call murals."[56] Although he saw their efficacy as dependent upon the architectural environment in which they were installed, the installation he envisioned for the Louisenberg paintings never came to pass.

Smith's palette sets *Mural* apart from the work of his colleagues. Its intense color alternates in varying degrees of hot and cool. He surrounded fiery orange segments with pools of deep blue pigment; blood-red components are often placed next to complimentary emerald green. Its vibrancy is countered by the addition of soft orchid, pale pink, powder blue, golden mustard, and battleship gray. It is a crazy cacophony of color, which Smith may have chosen because the entrance hall in which he located the mural lacked windows and was quite dark. Had he selected the earthier tones that Pollock and Still were using at that time, the painting would have gotten lost in the shadows. Sited opposite the front door and approximately ten feet away from it, *Mural* took up the entire thirteen-foot wall upon which it was placed. The front foyer was not very spacious and any visitor who came in the front door would have felt *Mural*'s impact.

[55] Smith ultimately completed a series of twenty-five paintings. He executed the majority of them between 1953–54, but Robert Swain and Robert Duran made the last and largest painting (eight-by-twelve feet) in 1968 by enlarging, under Smith's direction, one of his earlier and smaller versions.

[56] Tony Smith, letter to Ad Reinhardt, February 14, 1955, Ad Reinhardt Archives.

Sometime during the early winter of 1950, Smith brought Pollock out to show him the Stone House and its attendant wall painting.[57] Pollock had recently finished his *Mural* for the Gellers, which they used to divide their living and dining rooms. At one point Smith may have had a similar notion in mind for the Stone *Mural*, which could explain why he painted it on Masonite. A number of sketches he made while plotting out the mural reveal that he had thought about incorporating a hinged joint so that a third of the mural painting would have folded in as if it were a screen that could be used as a partition or perhaps even a freestanding wall. Instead, it was placed flush against the wall, and while Smith worked on the mural for a number of years, he left for Germany in 1953 before completing it. When he returned to the States, it soon became apparent to the Stones that he was too busy teaching, now that he had three children to support, and so they eventually turned the unfinished panel towards the wall and covered its verso with zebra-striped wallpaper.[58]

Dream of the Proper Context

According to B.H. Friedman, Pollock's first biographer, who became closely involved with the abstract expressionists in the early 1950s as a collector of their art, "[Smith] believed that the main reason for architecture was to make a place for art," specifically the paintings of Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still.[59] Smith, he said, also understood that a large, abstract expressionist painting worked best in "an undomesticated context—unframed and uncrowded in uncarpeted space—so that others could experience it 'by getting into it.'"[60] Friedman referred to this as Smith's "dream of

[57] Betty Stone remarked in her journal: "June 1951: Saw a lot of Tony last summer. He brought Pollock the 'great painter' who drips the paint on. (They were there [her Bernardsville home] one winter day)." Photocopy of Betty Stone's journal entry, curatorial files, Newark Museum.
[58] In 1977, the Stones sold their Bernardsville home to Mr. and Mrs. Salvatore Salibello, who subsequently discovered the Tony Smith mural, which had been turned towards the wall and covered over with wallpaper. The Salibellos gifted the painting to the Newark Museum in 1978, where it remained in storage until the spring of 2009 when it was placed on view in the museum's galleries.
[59] Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, 108.
[60] Ibid., 108.

the proper context," and Smith did, indeed, persistently draw up architectural schemes that revolved around the work of his friends. Many of Smith's architectural designs went no further than the sheet of paper on which they were drawn, but Smith continually refined them, partly because he believed that he would eventually find someone to finance the project's construction, but perhaps more importantly, because he believed in the very value of their conception. Ultimately, he probably preferred designing on paper, but that did not prevent him from completing some fifteen buildings, which for the most part were private homes. However, he envisioned over 150 different projects, many of which involved inventive ways to exhibit the large-sized paintings being produced at that time by his colleagues. Although these unbuilt projects went no further than the drafting table, their importance remains undiminished. As Smith scholar Joan Pachner notes, "It may be the visionary works, the most abstract ideas, that are the most historically significant aspect of [Smith's] architecture."[61]

Smith became intimately familiar with the architectural environment as a crucial context when he began to install exhibitions for Parsons's gallery. He helped install her very first show, "Northwest Coast Indian Painting," organized by Newman in 1946, which included twenty-eight objects such as drums, clothing, masks, and other ceremonial objects, many on loan from New York's Museum of Natural History. At first, Newman relied upon Smith's abilities as carpenter and handyman, skills that Smith had gained from his experience in building and construction. But Newman also found that he could rely on Smith's input with the actual design of the show. This was no simple hanging. They decided to exhibit these objects as if they were modern paintings and attached them to the wall with metal rods rather than placing them in display cases, as they were shown at the Museum of Natural History. Among the artifacts was a painted Tlingit house façade whose large and simple surface featured a pattern of stylized eyes that could easily be read as an abstract painting. Newman insisted on including it in the exhibition because he felt that its large scale and allover pattern was similar to that of

[61] Pachner, "Tony Smith," 63.

contemporary painting. A work such as this that was so large and monumentally simple may have influenced Newman's decision to increase the size and scale of his paintings, especially upon seeing it hung in Parsons's gallery where it would have conditioned the space of the viewer.[62]

Over the next ten years, Smith designed and installed many important painting shows in Parsons's gallery, which included multiple exhibitions by Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Still, Reinhardt, Stamos, Eugene Berman, and Gerome Kamrowski. It was not only his handiness with a hammer in conjunction with his design aesthetic that made him so capable at hanging their work. According to Friedman, Smith understood the architectural implications of the new large scale of their canvases, at a time when to almost everyone else they "just looked big."[63] He also had a keen sense of working with rather than against a space that resembled an artist's studio or loft—a windowless room with pale gray walls and a bare wood floor—as opposed to a middle-class living room. Parsons said, "I give them walls, they do the rest," but Smith felt that the size of Parsons's gallery challenged her artists to increase the size of their canvases.[64] The freedom she gave them also instigated a transformation in the artists' work: "Pollock changed his image from figurative to the kind of overall painting that made him famous, Barney made his breakthrough, Rothko made his."[65] Before long Smith felt the need to design additional contexts within which the Parsons artists could show their paintings.

One of Smith's most intriguing "visionary" projects involved a tent for exhibiting paintings. The design came about in early 1951, and, like many of Smith's unrealized projects, went through a variety configurations over the years. Originally it was to showcase the work of the eighteen artists *Life* magazine had dubbed "The Irascibles." These artists had refused to participate in a national competitive exhibition sponsored by

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[62] See David M. Quick, "Meaning in the Art of Barnett Newman and Three of His Contemporaries: A Study of Content in Abstract Expressionism," (PhD, dissertation, The University of Iowa, 1978), 222.
[63] Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, 108.
[64] Betty Parsons in Calvin Tomkins, "A Keeper of the Treasure," *The New Yorker*, June 9, 1975, 52.
[65] Smith, Tomkins interview, 2.

the Metropolitan Museum of Art titled "American Painting Today 1950," scheduled for December 1950. They felt that the Met's director, Francis Henry Taylor, had "on more than one occasion publicly declared his contempt for modern painting" and that the award juries had been "notoriously hostile to advance art."[66] In January 1951, soon after the exhibition opened, *Life* published Nina Leen's now famous group photograph of fifteen of the eighteen artists: William Baziotes, James Brooks, Jimmy Ernst, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Richard Pousette-Dart, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Hedda Sterne, Clyfford Still, and Bradley Walker Tomlin.[67] Gallery owner Sam Kootz wanted to organize an exhibition of the Irascibles's work and called on Smith to help him design and organize the installation. Smith, however, felt that Kootz's gallery could not accommodate the large-scale paintings that many of these artists were making at the time, and he did not want to present their smaller canvases, which he thought were not representative of their work. Smith, in fact, disliked Kootz's gallery, which was directly opposite Parsons's in more ways than just its location across the hall. Unlike Parsons's large, spare, white space, Kootz's gallery was based on the European model that most galleries in New York followed at that time. It was like a bourgeois living room with wall-to-wall carpeting, wainscoting, and houseplants in which Kootz tended to show small, framed paintings exhibited as decorative objects.[68] Kootz was also adverse to large paintings because he felt that collectors were reluctant to purchase a canvas that measured seven by ten feet. Unlike Parsons, who gave her artists complete artistic freedom and suffered slack sales because of it, Kootz was an astute businessman more concerned with the art of making a profit. According to Smith, "Betty never said a word

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[66] Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, 152.

[67] The three "missing" Irascibles were Fritz Bultman who was in Rome; Hans Hofmann who was in Provincetown, Massachusetts; and Weldon Kees who had left for San Francisco. (Years later, in 1955, Kees' car was found abandoned near the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge, and although his body never turned up, he was ruled to have died a suicide.)

[68] Smith felt the same way about Sidney Janis's gallery. In an undated note, he wrote, "Janis has always said that his rooms showed how pictures would look in apartment rooms. He did not want the free, undefined space as that of Parsons's gallery." Smith, undated note, TSEA.

about their size whereas Sam Kootz was always telling his artists that big pictures wouldn't sell."[69]

An exhibition tent for The Irascibles soon developed into a place to show the paintings of Smith's four favorite artists: Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still. Had it come to fruition, it would have been one of the first instances of a small group show of related artists as opposed to the more typical survey of isolated, contextless, single works by many artists.[70] Smith's design would also have invited the spectator to view the work within a closed environment that would have involved him/her spatially, kinaesthetically, and intellectually as well as visually.

Smith's notes and preliminary sketches indicate that his idea for the tent was informed by a variety of modern architectural sources, one of which was Le Corbusier. By 1950, Smith was turning increasingly toward the style of Le Corbusier of the 1920s and, as we shall see, was beginning to build in this manner. Ideologically, Le Corbusier was key to Smith's conception of his exhibition pavilion. Next to an early sketch for the tent, Smith referenced Le Corbusier's Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, a structure the European modernist had built for the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts held in Paris, and that he based on a single square or module (fig. 3.6).[71] Similarly, Smith employed a single cell for his tent, albeit a hexagon. Le Corbusier's controversial pavilion was relegated to the back lot of the exposition's fairgrounds, just as Smith intended to distance his exhibition tent from Fifty-Seventh Street's gallery row by erecting it in a parking lot, a Manhattan yard, or even out in the open space of Long Island. The tent could function as a standardized exhibition space that could be built quickly, easily, and economically, reflecting a core element of Le Corbusier's design philosophy. This strategy may also have been informed by Buckminster Fuller; Smith had worked on a set of blueprints for Fuller's Dymaxion

[69] Smith, Tomkins interview, 2.
[70] According to Friedman, Smith's idea for an exhibition of the four artists may have influenced MoMA's exhibition strategies. *Energy Made Visible*, 154.
[71] Constructed of steel, reinforced concrete, and blocks, the pavilion was conceived as one unit of Le Corbusier's Immeuble-Villas, his 1922 apartment house project.

House in the 1940s. Or perhaps it was in the Irascibles' spirit of dissidence that inspired Smith to look upon Le Corbusier's pavilion given that Le Corbusier's pavilion contrasted directly with the other exhibits at the 1925 exposition, which primarily showcased fashionable, decorative, luxury style and products—everything that Smith hated about Kootz's gallery. Like Smith's proposed tent, Le Corbusier's pavilion was designed as a place to show pictures, such as Fernand Léger's *The Baluster* (1925), within a Spartan décor. Léger, like Smith, thought that paintings should no longer be decorative objects, but architectural ones that possessed the same qualities as their structural environment, such as stability and repose. *The Baluster* was meant to be seen as an architectural element within an architectural composition. Finally, it was Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau pavilion that earned the European modernist wider recognition, especially in the United States, which may also have been something that Smith hoped to achieve with his exhibition tent.[72]

An amphitheater designed by Eero Saarinen in 1949 for the Aspen Music Center served as Smith's physical model for his exhibition tent. Saarinen designed a tent for the annual festival, which, like Smith's tent, was a far cry from a carnival structure. With seating for two thousand, it featured naturally finished wooden poles, white canvas with tangerine-colored side walls, and a freestanding accordion-pleated plywood wall at the rear of the tent's triangular stage. The accordion-shaped wall begins to appear as a recurring theme in Smith's architecture. He had at one time constructed an accordion-shaped wall as a way to show more of Rothko's paintings at Parsons. Subsequently, Newman would employ the zigzag pattern in the floor-to-ceiling windows of synagogue he would begin designing in 1951 and later used it for his two-piece sculpture, *Zim Zum*

[72] Although many visitors to the exposition missed seeing Le Corbusier's pavilion because of its remote location (including Henry Russell Hitchcock), the American press did not. Further, news of the pavilion circulated amongst academics as well as the avant-garde. According to Alfred H. Barr, MoMA's first director, "I knew nothing of Corbu when I was abroad on my first European trip in the summer of 1924. I think the first time I heard his name was in the fall of 1925 at Princeton [University] where I heard accounts of the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau." Barr in Mardges Bacon, *Le Corbusier in America: Travels in the Land of the Timid*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 15.

(1969). A number of architectural magazines published photographs and architectural drawings of Saarinen's tent, which Smith, who read voraciously, was sure to have seen. There was also mention of it in the *New York Times*.[73] In fact, Smith's project drawings resemble what Saarinen actually produced, but with one major difference. A cutaway view of Smith's tent design includes sketches of rectangular-shaped panels that resemble the frieze-like paintings that Pollock was producing at that time, such as *Number 2, 1949, Number 13A: Arabesque* (1948), and *Number 7* (1950). They hang throughout the tent like panels hovering above ground. In one instance, two of the paintings actually intersect. It is as if Smith were dividing space with the "canvases," similar to Peter Blake's installation of Pollock's paintings in his Ideal Museum model. Smith clearly had Pollock in mind when he designed his exhibition tent and likely intended it for Pollock's large-sized paintings; in 1953 he wrote Newman from Heidelberg that he had sent Pollock "sketches of the tent I did at the time he painted the three big pictures [*One Number 31, 1950*, *Number 32, 1950*, and *Autumn Rhythm* (1950)]."[74]

Alongside a preliminary sketch for the tent, Smith made the notation "Theatre in Round."[75] This may have been partly inspired by Saarinen, who had incorporated a central stage in his amphitheater, but the idea of a theater in the round was something that Smith and Newman discussed in their frequent exchanges about church and synagogue architecture. Conceiving the exhibition tent as a Theatre in the Round in which to experience paintings, Newman's among them, is what Smith was thinking of when he planned his design. In September 1950, before Kootz contacted Smith about designing an exhibition of the Irascibles, Newman wrote to Smith about certain churches and synagogues that he and Annalee had visited while vacationing in Newport, Rhode Island. Newman was especially taken with the Touro Synagogue, the oldest synagogue building

[73] See "Goethe Fete Split Into Two Sections, 20-Day Festival at Aspen, Col., Starts June 27 and Includes Panels by Noted Scholars," *New York Times*, April 19, 1949; "Music Tent for Goethe Bicentennial Convocation and Music Festival at Aspen, Colorado," *Architectural Forum* (September 1949): 88–89; and "Tent to House a Summer Music Festival, Aspen, Colorado," *Arts and Architecture* (October 1950): 32–33.
[74] Tony Smith, letter to Barnett Newman, August 11, 1953, in BNFA.
[75] See "Tony Smith Sketchbook No. 29," 1949–50, TSEA.

in the United States, which he described to Smith as "a true work of art."[76] The synagogue, although not modern, is characterized by proportion, balance, and symmetry—the hallmarks of Georgian architecture. It appears to have inspired a central feature of Smith's exhibition tent as well as the bimah in Newman's own architectural design for a synagogue, which he would begin working on the next year, in 1951. "The [Touro] synagogue is terrific," Newman wrote Smith. "The outside is a box. The inside is the essence of an open, living space, the true theatre in the round—where everyone feels himself in it."[77] As will be further discussed in the next chapter, Newman's response to the Touro Synagogue as a theatre in the round—"where everyone feels himself in it"—was similar to what he had experienced two years earlier in Ohio at the Native American Indian mounds. This is the feeling that he hoped to achieve in his synagogue design of 1951. Newman's experience of the Ohioan Indian mounds initiated the development of his ideas concerning "place," "location," or "site," a concept that was key first to his 1951 synagogue design and later would become integral to the experience he intended for viewers of his paintings and sculpture. The idea of place begins in Ohio, extends to architecture, and becomes directly related to painting.

While living in Germany, Smith produced formal architectural renderings of his exhibition tent, and although it was never fabricated, it served as prelude to his grandest vision for exhibiting Pollock's work within a modern architectural environment.

The Smith/Pollock Church

> *I think the possibilities of using painting on glass in modern architecture—in modern construction—terrific.*
>
> —Jackson Pollock, 1950[78]

[76] Touro Synagogue was dedicated in 1763 and designated a National Historic Site in 1946. Newman in letter to Tony Smith, September 5, 1950, TSEA.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Jackson Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," 1950. Reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, Reviews,* ed. Pepe Karmel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 23 (hereafter cited as *JPIAR*).

By 1950, Smith and Pollock had become close friends. Over the years, Smith had helped Pollock install a number of his shows at Parsons, visited exhibitions with him, drank with him at the Cedar Tavern, and often stayed with Pollock in Springs. Smith was one of the few people whom Pollock allowed in his studio to watch him paint.[79] In the mid–50s Smith and Pollock briefly experimented together pouring and molding fine-grade cement. Smith also interpreted Pollock's dreams and occasionally gave him advice on painting. Pollock admired Smith and championed his aesthetic. He described Smith to B.H. Friedman as "a great architect," deeming the Fred Olsen house "the best thing Tony has done," which he had seen when he went to look at the installation of his painting, *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952* (1952).[80] Fritz Bultman recalled, "Tony was the man I feel I handed Jackson over to when I introduced them. With his knowledge as an architect, he was the perfect person for Jackson."[81] What made Smith perfect for Pollock, presumably, was that they had shared interests in integrating painting with modern architectural settings. Smith could help Pollock realize this, which he attempted to achieve on at least one occasion.

During the winter of 1950, Pollock and Lee Krasner stayed for an extended period of time at Alfonso Ossorio's MacDougal Alley townhouse while Ossorio was away in the Philippines working on a mural for a church. Ossorio was a collector of Pollock's work as well as friend and early supporter. He used his home as a residence and exhibition space, and while he was away he thought that Pollock could use it also to showcase some of his large paintings in the hopes of attracting mural commissions. When Ossorio returned to New York in the fall, he tried to secure a commission for the artist and architect: a Roman Catholic Church that would feature Pollock's paintings as integral to its design. The Smith/Pollock Church project never developed beyond the stage of

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[79] See Phyllis Tuchman, "Tony Smith, Modern Master," *New Jersey Monthly* (January 1981): 125.
[80] Jackson Pollock in Friedman, *Energy Made Visible*, xvii.
[81] Fritz Bultman in Jeffrey Potter, *To A Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1985), 123.

drawings and a three-dimensional model, yet its significance lies in the fact that it represents Smith's attempt to unite abstract expressionist painting and modern architecture with a degree of artistic coherence that would not be seen until almost twenty years later with the Rothko Chapel in Houston.

Before the history that follows, a full and accurate account of the Smith/Pollock Church project has never been given. With the exception of two articles, the project has received scant critical attention in the literature on abstract expressionism.[82] Yet the Smith/Pollock Church project stands as an important episode in the history of twentieth-century contemporary religious art and architecture (a study that deserves more attention in itself). Smith, in a 1954 draft of a letter to John Entenza, editor of *Arts and Architecture* magazine, felt it was important to "relay how [the church project] came about."[83] The story finally finds its place here.

The idea of building a church was not new to Smith, who had envisioned several chapel designs as early as 1943. He was raised Irish Catholic and was educated by Jesuits, but his reason for designing churches was far more practical than religious.[84] Smith knew—and rightly so—that modern churches had a better chance of being built

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[82] See E.A. Carmean, Jr., "Les peintures noires de Jackson Pollock et le projet d'église de Tony Smith" in *Jackson Pollock* (Paris: Musée National de l'Art Moderne, 1981); abridged version of the essay published as "The Church Project: Pollock's Passion Themes," *Art in America* 70, no. 6 (Summer 1982): 110–122. See also Rosalind Krauss, "Contra Carmean: The Abstract Pollock," *Art in America* 70, no. 6 (Summer 1982): 70–76, 123–131, 155; revised and republished as "Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), 221–242. The Smith/Pollock Church project is also briefly discussed in Eric Lum, "Pollock's Promise: Toward an Abstract Expressionist Architecture," *Assemblage,* no. 39 (August 1999): 63–92; and William Kaizen, "Framed Space: Allan Kaprow and the Spread of Painting," *Grey Room,* no. 13 (Fall 2003): 81–106. See also E.A. Carmean, Jr., "The Pollock Puzzle," *Washington Post,* March 21, 1982; and Jo Ann Lewis, "The Pollock Dispute," *Washington Post,* April 13, 1982.

[83] Tony Smith, draft of a letter to John Entenza, Editor, *Arts and Architecture*, May 19, 1954, TSEA.

[84] Smith told Paul Cummings that coming from a Catholic family, his notion of an artist was one who practiced painting, sculpture, and architecture, not just one category of art. This explained his reason for wanting to build churches. As he told Cummings, "The church always encouraged the idea of the Renaissance man . . . and to be useful to the church, build churches." Smith, Cummings interview, TSEA.

than any other building at that time with an experimental design. After the war, in both Europe and the United States, there existed a number of influential and powerful Catholics who found traditional sacred art and architecture anachronistic. They promoted the design and construction of modern churches, which were to be furnished with modern art. In America, there was the Liturgical Arts Society, a national movement composed of both lay people and clergy that was headed by Maurice Lavanoux, the American counterpart of Père Marie-Alain Couturier, the Dominican priest behind the creation of some of Europe's most important examples of twentieth-century religious art and architecture, including Le Corbusier's chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp (1954); Matisse's architectural design, murals, stained glass windows, and priests' vestments for the Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence (1949–1951); and the Eglise du Sacré Cœur d'Audincourt with stained glass by Léger. Couturier also served as advisor to the de Menils of Houston, who collected modern art, and was the force behind the realization of the Rothko Chapel.

By the mid-1940s, many Christians felt that traditional church art had reached a crisis point. According to Lavanoux, church-goods supply houses "have debased the taste of generations of worshippers" by filling churches with mass-produced, painted-plaster "catalogue Virgins." He continued: "We need the contemporary artist to help us end the scandal of the trash that is in our churches."[85] Likewise, Pope Pius XII claimed, "Modern art should be given free scope in the due and reverent service of the church."[86] Lavanoux's efforts to commission contemporary art that supported the Roman Catholic liturgy was enjoined by Otto Spaeth, a wealthy collector of modern art, one-time vice president of the Whitney Museum of American Art, a founder of the Liturgical Arts

[85] "Art: Provided," *Time Magazine*, September 18, 1950, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,813266,00.html.
[86] Pope Pius XII, "Mediator Dei," 1947, in Denis R. McNamara, *Catholic Church Architecture and the Spirit of the Liturgy* (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago, Liturgy Training Publications, 2009), 153n13.

Society, and Pollock's and Ossorio's neighbor.[87] Spaeth especially championed modern ecclesiastic architecture, claiming "The first requirement of a church or temple today is that it be of today."[88] He found it anachronistic for the parishioner who "drives a streamlined car to work in an office or factory where everything has been designed for maximum efficiency and comfort . . . to hurl himself back centuries to say his prayers in the pious gloom of a gothic or Romanesque past."[89] In August of 1950, Spaeth and Lavanoux traveled to Rome for the First International Congress for Catholic Art. They were accompanied by James Johnson Sweeney, recent curator of the Museum of Modern Art's painting and sculpture department (1935–1946), who was soon to be appointed director of the Guggenheim Museum (1952–1960), and who also felt strongly about modernizing Catholic art and architecture. Energized by the meeting, they returned to New York determined to realize the construction of modern church structures.

The design and construction of contemporary religious architecture that flourished throughout the 1950s was not restricted to Christian buildings.[90] The construction of modern synagogues was also on the rise throughout the US. Simultaneous to the Smith/Pollock Church project, Newman had begun working on his own architectural ideas for a synagogue. Robert Motherwell was at work on a sixteen-by-eighteen foot mural for B'nai Israel in Millburn, New Jersey. Other artists were also working on projects for churches. In the spring of 1950, Ossorio was in the Philippines completing a mural for the Chapel of St. Joseph the Worker, which had been constructed for the

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[87] Otto's wife, Eloise, was deputy commissioner of the American Pavilion at the 1952 Venice Biennale as well as a tireless supporter of the Archives of American Art. Through her efforts, the Smithsonian Institution acquired the Archives as one of their bureaus, for which she received the Henry Medal, the Smithsonian Institution's highest honor.

[88] Edwin Scott Gaustad and Lee Eric Schmidt, *The Religious History of America*: *The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today* (New York: HarpersCollins, 2002), 341.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Religious construction at this time expanded enormously, rising from $500 million in 1950 to more than $1.2 billion in 1965 (adjusted for inflation). See Robert Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 120–121. Synagogue construction was also on the rise. Approximately one thousand synagogues were consecrated in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, a number of which commissioned work by contemporary artists. See Janay Jadine Wong, "Synagogue Art of the 1950s, A New Context for Abstraction," *Art Journal*, 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 37–43.

workers employed by Ossorio's father's sugar company, Victorias Milling. Designed by the American architectural firm of Raymond and Rado, the chapel design was modern. And Ossorio, while a far more traditional painter than Pollock, managed to create a stir by giving Jesus a modern, Filipino face. When he returned to New York in the late summer, he "came back full of excitement about what could be done [with modern painting in a modern church setting]."[91] In November, Ossorio invited Lavanoux to MacDougal Alley to show him slides of his newly completed mural in the hopes that it would be published in *Liturgical Arts,* the monthly journal that Lavanoux edited (which it was). It was at this point that Lavanoux informed Ossorio that Spaeth and Sweeney were looking for local artists to collaborate on a modern church project within their vicinity.[92] Ossorio immediately thought of Smith, who he knew as an architect and "a great friend of Jackson's."[93]

Pollock's interest in mural commissions peaked during the summer of 1950. He had installed his painting for the Gellers that June, which whet his appetite for additional site-specific opportunities. It was shortly afterwards that he told Parsons, "I am going to try to get some mural commissions through an agent . . . I feel it important for me to broaden my possibilities in this line of development."[94] Pollock's biographers, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, note that it was during the summer of 1950 that "there was persistent talk about mural commissions in California," and although they do not disclose who initiated the discussions, it was most likely Charles and Ray Eames who

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[91] Alfonso Ossorio, interview with Forrest Selvig, November 19, 1968, AAA, http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/ossori68.htm.
[92] Smith in undated notebook, (probably 1954), TSEA.
[93] Ossorio, interview with Selvig.
[94] Pollock, letter to Betty Parsons, undated—probably late spring 1950; on June 25, 1950, Parsons wrote back to Pollock addressing his interest in pursuing commissions. See Steven W. Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1989), 625 (hereafter cited as Naifeh/Smith)—in Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) 4:245 (Cited hereafter as *JPCR*).

were working in Los Angeles on Case House Studies at the time.[95] Lee Krasner later confirmed that the idea of putting his paintings in architectural settings was a constant aspiration of Pollock's.[96] Pollock was open to propositions and when Ossorio approached him about a possible commission for a church, Pollock agreed on the condition that Smith design the building. It was a speculative project, there being neither site nor client. Smith later recalled, "I had some doubts about it. I decided to go ahead."[97]

Smith did not begin working on the Church project until sometime in early 1951. In 1950, he was busy finishing up the semester at New York University as well as the Stone House in New Jersey, and in February 1951 he received two important commissions, the Olsen houses. All the while, Ossorio kept reminding Pollock to "prod Tony from time to time," because he wanted to have a model of the church made in Paris and needed time "to get the model maker used to the idea that he is going to do something out of the ordinary," although Smith ultimately produced the model.[98] What Smith envisioned for the church developed from the exhibition tent that he had recently designed. Again, his architectural sources and inspirations were varied. Smith's architectural style can best be described as a synthesis of old and new; traditional and modern sources, to which he added his own unique vision. The overall design descends from Wright's "Honeycomb House," which Smith had first seen in the 1938 issue of *Architectural Forum*. While the tent was just one unit, the church was to feature twelve interlocking hexagons nested together (fig. 3.7). Further, he elevated the modules high above the ground by placing them on mushroom-shaped columns, similar to the columns Wright had designed for his Johnson Wax Building (Racine, Wisconsin, 1936–39). Smith located a thirteenth unit to house the baptistery apart from the main "honeycomb," yet

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[95] Naifeh/Smith, 613. Francis Valentine O'Connor, in an email message to the author, May 29, 2009, wrote that Pollock had been in constant contact with Charles and Ray Eames concerning mural commissions.

[96] E.A. Carmean, Jr., in conversation with Lee Krasner in E.A. Carmean, Jr., "Church Project," 122n7.

[97] Smith, undated notebook, TSEA.

[98] Ossorio also paid to have the model of the Pollock/Blake Ideal Museum constructed. Ossorio, letter to Pollock, December 23, 1950, Jackson Pollock/Lee Krasner Papers, AAA.

connected to it by a ramp (a device he used in the Olsen House that he was building at that time). In form the church referred to Wright, but the idea of placing a low horizontal building with ribbon windows, another of the church's features, on raised pylons obviously referenced Le Corbusier. Indeed, the proposed church reflected all that Smith liked about International Style architecture: strict regularity, straightforward use of materials, unornamented, and an open plan. Further, Smith had intended to encase his church in white porcelain, "like an icebox," which is also a hallmark of Le Corbusier's style from the 1920s.[99]

The Englishman Eric Gill, a predecessor of Levanoux, Spaeth, and Sweeney as a proponent of Catholic reform, is a little known, yet direct inspiration for an important feature of Smith's church. Smith not only subscribed to Gill's revolutionary ideas, but also responded to the fact that Gill, too, was an artist and sculptor who had also designed and built a church.[100] During the 1920s and 30s, Gill railed against the traditions of the church including its liturgy, rituals, and accoutrements. He detested the fact that churches had grown larger and larger, and altars more elaborate and splendid, which he felt only served to separate the people from God. His ideal was "a plain building, and in the apparent centre of it, whatever its actual geometrical shape, slightly raised so that it may be visible to all, the altar with crucifix above or upon it. The people are on all sides, the Mass proceeds, whether in Latin or in English or any other language. Everybody can see

[99] Smith, note on undated drawing, TSEA. Porcelain enamel was manufactured by the American Rolling Mill Company and could be used as a facing material for exteriors. According to one of their 1950s advertisements, it was used in theaters, banks, restaurant interiors, and many commercial buildings because its hard, durable surface resisted denting, scratching and weather staining. In addition to Wright and Le Corbusier, John Keenen suggests that Smith may also have looked to Paul Nelson's essay on his unbuilt *La Maison Suspendu* (1937–38), which Smith owned a copy of. Keenen, "Architecture," in *Tony Smith*, 1998, 45.

[100] Gill was a controversial yet influential figure known as much for his commercially successful and classic typefaces as he was for his religious views. He was a founder of Distributism, an economic philosophy that served as the basis for Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement. He was also a sculptor, a stonecutter, and a printmaker. His one architectural work was the design and construction of a church, St. Peter the Apostle at Gorleston-on-Sea, Norfolk, England.

what is being done."[101] This is exactly what Smith did in his church—he placed the altar in the center of the central hexagon. And as in the exhibition tent, a central altar also conformed to Smith's idea of creating a theater in the round, a more direct form of focus that rejects illusionism. In both cases, the tent and the church, the spectators would have been surrounded by Pollock's paintings and able to actively participate in viewing them.

Pollock's Participation

The extent of Pollock's participation in the architectural design of the church is not known. Nor was it known, until now, what Pollock intended to produce for the church, which has invited lively debate between two scholars, E.A. Carmean, Jr. and Rosalind Krauss. The Smith/Pollock Church project has received little critical attention with the exception of their two articles and anything that has been written on it since derives from their speculations. As we shall see, recently uncovered evidence reveals that their speculations were wrong.

Carmean, who wrote the first essay on the Smith/Pollock church project when he discovered its plans in Smith's archives in the summer of 1981, contends that Pollock's 1951–52 series of works known as the "black paintings" contain Christian iconography such as the crucifixion, lamentation, and descent from the cross and, without going so far as to say that they are actual studies, believes that they were made in anticipation of the planned church. Thus, he feels that they explain what he sees as a two-year interruption in the body of Pollock's abstract work. Krauss, who caustically claims that Carmean "recovered the 'Pollock-Smith church project' from the oblivion into which it had sunk," refutes this, arguing that figuration was nothing new in Pollock's work and that the "black-and-white paintings" are simply a continuation within his oeuvre, not a rupture.[102] Their arguments then turn to where Pollock's paintings would have been placed within Smith's design for the church. Carmean claims that squiggly lines within what appears to

[101] Eric Gill, "Mass for the Masses," in *The Cross and the Plough: The Organ of the Catholic Land Associations of England and Wales*, vol. 4 (1938): 10.
[102] See Carmean, "The Church Project," 110–122; and Krauss, "Contra Carmean," 123–131.

be a preliminary drawing of the church's ceiling indicate that Pollock planned a series of ceiling paintings. As Krauss rightly points out, not only is there no proof that the squiggly lines denote paintings, but who knows if it was Smith, Pollock, or someone else altogether who put the lines on the undated drawing? And when? In fact, there is no evidence that Pollock wanted to use the ceiling as a surface for his paintings. Indeed, from his notes it is clear that Smith intended a glass ceiling for his church, which would have rendered Pollock's paintings upon the transparent support nearly invisible on a sunny day, a vague silhouette when it was overcast, and undetectable against the dark sky at night.[103]

Suddenly, Carmean decides to rely on Krasner's memory and states that Pollock's participation shifted from ceiling paintings to that of one room that was to contain six paintings. Five, he believes, were to be along the lines of the new "black-and-white" paintings and the sixth was to be *Lucifer* (1947), a work that, according to Krasner, Smith especially liked.[104] Krauss finds fault again, and rightly points out that Smith had based his church on an open plan; nowhere within the preliminary drawings or the actual model is there a provision for a single, closed room. Yet oddly enough, Krauss proceeds to argue for basically the same scenario: that Pollock intended a set of six paintings that were to be either mounted or suspended from the ceiling to form a hexagon. This is not the "room" of Carmean's description, she argues, but a sacred enclosure that would convey the religio-aesthetic aspirations that Smith had for his church, although it's unclear how a room differs from an enclosure. She dismisses the idea that Pollock ever intended to incorporate the black-and-white paintings within Smith's church. The colorful *Lucifer* amidst the black-and-white paintings that Pollock was working on at that time would have resulted in what she describes as a "conceptual mismatch" between architecture and painting, as well as between painting and architecture.[105] Instead, she

[103] Eric Lum, who offers the only other extended discussion of the Smith/Pollock church project, bases his understanding of the church's proposed design and its accompanying paintings by Pollock on Carmean's essays. See Eric Lum, "Pollock's Promise," 85–88.
[104] Krauss, "Contra Carmean," 129.
[105] Ibid., 128.

envisions the "floating, luminous space" within Pollock's classic allover paintings that would "synchronize" with Smith's architectural design. Krauss agrees that one of the canvases would, indeed, have been *Lucifer*, but this is a curious choice given its title in addition to the fact that it is a wide and narrow horizontal painting—forty-one inches by eight feet and nine inches. A canvas with these dimensions would have fit awkwardly within the hexagonal configuration of "the enclosure." She concludes that there is no reason to believe that Smith ever modified this vision, but evidence within Smith's archives proves otherwise.

The definitive evidence against the idea of a Pollock room comes from Smith's notes, plans, model, and writings, which convincingly prove that Pollock was to paint on glass. This would be entirely consistent with Pollock's enthusiastic pronouncement made simultaneous to Smith preparing his designs for the church: "I think the possibilities of using painting on glass in modern architecture—in modern construction—terrific."[106] Krauss insists that there is no record of windows in the church, yet Smith's model makes clear that the church was to feature eleven bands of windows, each three feet high and twelve feet wide, that were to be installed as clerestories above the structure's hexagonal cells.[107] The clerestory would have separated the vertical planes of the wall from the church's cantilevered roof system. In one of the drawings, he indicated that the ceiling above the altar was to be of "blue glass" and that within the clerestory "Pollock paintings on glass. (fig. 3.8)"[108] In 1954, Smith wrote to John Entenza, editor of *Arts & Architecture*, in the hopes that he might publish a photograph of his church model in their magazine. The architect stated his plans: "Pollock had recently painted his picture on glass, and since he has always liked a long narrow horizontal format, the windows were to be paintings on clear glass of that shape. There was to be no other 'decoration' except

[106] Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," 1950, *JPIAR*, 23.
[107] At one point, Carmean believes that Pollock suggested and Smith accepted his idea of making the paintings on windows. Krauss argues that the window theory is tenuous for a number of reasons, but what would "finish it off altogether" is that in the model used for the presentation of the church there is no provision for windows. The model did, however, have windows. See Krauss, "Reading Jackson Pollock, Abstractly," 227.
[108] Tony Smith, undated drawing, TSEA.

the character of the structure itself, the cross, above the altar, and the XP symbol on the base of the ramp."[109] Further, in a draft of the letter to Entenza, Smith wrote: "Mr. Pollock has always liked the long horizontal shape, which is that of the windows."[110]

That Pollock intended to make his paintings on glass is not surprising. At the time, Lavanoux, who had the ability to make the church a reality, was on a campaign to resurrect polychromed windows in modern churches. Lavanoux's efforts to revivify painting on glass were assisted by Otto Spaeth's wife, Eloise, who in January 1952, was planning an exhibition on recent developments in stained and painted glass to be held at Guild Hall in East Hampton. Lavanoux wrote about the upcoming show in his widely read journal, *Liturgical Arts,* praising it as a creative approach to ecclesiastic art and urging that "painters be brought into the design and making of [painted] windows."[111] This was just one of many articles and images that he published in *Liturgical Arts* that promoted the incorporation of paintings on glass in modern church architecture. In the May 1951 issue, when the church project had been proposed and Smith was in the midst of finalizing its design, Lavanoux wrote that the art of painted glass in the United States had reached a "state of suspended animation" and suggested that painters "could bring the vitality of their imaginations to bear on the designs and execution of the windows."[112] He was especially enthusiastic about the work of André Girard and Jean Labatut. Girard, a French painter who had come to the United States after the war to paint churches, believed that painting on glass would revolutionize the liturgical arts. His colleague, the Beaux-Arts trained architect Labatut, produced a model of a cylindrical glass church on which Girard painted nearly all of the glass walls. Their prototype represented an ultimate unity between painting and architecture, even more so than the traditional collaborative effort in which the artist's paintings essentially decorate the architect's church. By incorporating painting on glass, Smith and Pollock would have achieved the same.

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[109] Smith, letter to John Entenza, May 19, 1954, TSEA.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Maurice Lavanoux, "Editor's Diary," *Liturgical Arts*, vol. 20 (August 1952): 124.
[112] Maurice Lavanoux, "Adventure in Light-Color-Polychromy, A Church Prototype, An Interview," *Liturgical Arts,* vol. 20 (November 1951): 5.

Pollock would have been attracted to the idea of painting on glass as it would have presented him with an opportunity to employ a new technique. As Girard was quoted in the Lavanoux article, it was possible to paint on Thermopane, a material Pollock had explored in the late 1940s at the request of Katharine Ordway, who wanted to see if it were possible to use Thermopane to protect a canvas installed outdoors. But rather than encase a canvas in the Thermopane, one could paint the inner surface of the glass and seal the painting forever. As Pollock told William Wright in the fall of 1950, "New needs need new techniques. And the modern artists have found new ways and new means of making their statements."[113]

A new challenge is also something the artist seemed to be looking for at that time. As an explanation for his black-on-white paintings of 1950–51, Krasner later stated, "After the '50 show, what do you do next? He couldn't have gone further doing the same thing."[114] Painting on glass would have demanded a different way of thinking about his technique in that the exterior appearance of the painted window is quite different from what one sees from the interior. But perhaps most convincing of all is Pollock's reply to Wright when he asked him about *Number 29, 1950*, the painting on glass created during the Namuth filming. Pollock replied, "That's something new for me. That's the first thing I've done on glass and I find it very exciting." And then—totally unprompted by Wright, Pollock added, "I think the possibilities of using painting on glass in modern architecture—in modern construction—terrific."[115] Was it Lavanoux's enthusiasm for painting on glass in combination with Pollock's wish to complete the proposed Smith/Pollock Church that elicited this unprompted remark?

That Smith and Pollock knew about Lavanoux's enthusiasm for painted glass is likely. The November 1951 issue of *Liturgical Arts* that included Lavanoux's enthusiastic "Adventure in Light-Color-Polychromy," also featured an article on thirty-four artists "tentatively 'commissioned'" for eclesiastical arts projects, one of which included

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[113] Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," 1950, *JPIAR*, 20.
[114] Lee Krasner in interview with B.H. Friedman in *Jackson Pollock: Black and White* (New York: Marlborough Gallery, 1969), 7.
[115] Pollock, "Interview with William Wright," *JPIAR*, 23.

Pollock. The author, William Justema, was primarily concerned with how the artists handled their mediums, their grasp of design problems, and their stylistic devices. Pollock, he found, had a "great love for paint, with a great contempt for its usual uses."[116] All the more reason to think that *Liturgical Arts* would have opted to publish the Smith/Pollock Church as a prototype for an adventurous diocese to build. But this was not to be. Sometime in the later summer of 1952, Smith, the Pollocks, Ossorio, the Spaeths, Lavanoux, Sweeney, Rosalind Constable of *Time Magazine*, and Father George Barry Ford, a Catholic chaplain at Columbia University, met to review the model of Smith's church. Presumably, Smith also discussed the location for Pollock's paintings within the clerestory. Smith recalled "The Pollocks were delighted with the building."[117] Ossorio recollected that "there was not one iota of enthusiasm, just a shocked—they were tongue-tied." He suggests that the church was not accepted because at that time "Pollock was still very controversial."[118] Smith recounted that Spaeth may have felt that the skylight above the central altar would have made the church too hot.[119] Eloise Spaeth remembered that the project seemed too abstract.[120] She told Jeffrey Potter that Lavanoux, she, and her husband "liked the concept, but we felt no pastor in the U.S. was ready to build such a church. We *had* to discourage Tony and Jackson."[121] Storr believes that "the plan pleased Sweeney and his core of supporters, [yet] it failed to pass muster

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[116] William Justema, "Sources of Style for Christian Art," *Liturgical Arts*, vol. 19 (November 1951): 33. Mark Rothko was also one of the thirty-four "tentatively commissioned" artists.
[117] Tony Smith, letter to John Entenza, May 19, 1954, TSEA.
[118] Ossorio, interview, Selvig.
[119] According to Smith, Otto Spaeth asked: "'Do you expect a priest to say a mass wearing thirty pounds of vestments under that skylight?' While I couldn't imagine why even the most brocade-laden vestments should weigh thirty pounds, I said that I felt with proper ventilation and heat resisting glass which I had intended for this purpose and because of its blue color to create a celestial color and to contrast with the architecture of everything in the building and the clear glass of the windows on which would be Pollock's paintings . . . Anyway, the Spaeths just left and that was all I heard from that quarter." Smith, undated notebook (probably 1954), TSEA.
[120] See Krauss, "Contra Carmean, 232.
[121] Eloise Spaeth in *Violent Grave*, 154 (emphasis in the original).

with the wider constituency it needed in order to be realized, and the whole endeavor was dropped in the fall of 1952."[122]

Home is Where the Art Is: Fred Olsen Sr. House (1951–53)

Sometime in late 1950, just as Ossorio began talking to Pollock about the possibility of working on a church with Smith, Smith was in the process of securing a commission to design and build two separate homes in Guilford, Connecticut, for Dr. Fred Olsen. Beginning in the late 1940s, eastern Connecticut had become a locus for experimental modern architecture. A group of students and teachers from the Harvard Graduate School of Design known as the Harvard Five had began building homes in New Canaan, which were the complete antithesis of the traditional colonial style that predominated the neighborhood. Smith would find himself in the company of Marcel Breuer, Landis Gores, John M. Johansen, Eliot Noyes, and Philip Johnson, who had recently completed his Glass House in New Canaan (1949). There were also architects from Yale University, such as E. Carleton Granbery, who had just finished a waterfront house (Brown House, 1950) around the bend from the Olsen property that employed the core principles of modern architecture: horizontal planes, use of glass and wood, an open floor plan, and a synergy between house and site. Smith would incorporate similar strategies for the Olsen houses, yet with a style entirely his own.

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[122] Robert Storr, "A Man of Parts," in *Tony Smith*, 1998, 16. For several years thereafter, Smith sought to have his hexagonal church built. He wrote to John Entenza, editor of *Arts & Architecture*, in the hopes that the magazine would be interested in publishing photographs of his model. Ten years later, Smith contacted Henry Clifford, Curator of Paintings, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In his letter Smith stated that "This is the best thing I have ever done and I am naturally interested in any possibility of its being executed." Smith, letter to Henry Clifford, Philadelphia Museum of Art, January 10, 1962, TSEA. In 1955–57, Marcel Breuer erected a field office for a construction project in Rotterdam that so closely resembles Smith's church design that one wonders if Breuer ever saw the model or plans. Although the office was intended as a temporary structure during the construction of De Bijenkorf (The Beehive) Department Store, its honeycomb shape was so pleasing that the city decided to turn it into a children's museum. See Isabelle Hyman, *Marcel Breuer, Architect: The Career and the Buildings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 30.

Olsen wanted a weekend house not only for him and his family, but also for his son, Fred Olsen Jr. The two homes were to be built close to one another upon an abandoned granite quarry, for which Guilford was known. Olsen originally considered hiring Alden Dow, who, like Smith, had studied with Wright in the 1930s. Dr. Olsen was a chemical engineer who made a fortune during the Second World War from a formula for a type of smokeless gunpowder that he had developed. The fact that Dow's father had founded the Dow Chemical Company would have appealed to Olsen, but Dow proved too expensive, and so Fred Olsen Jr. "went to New York and found Tony Smith."[123]

Smith designed an assemblage of inter-related structures for the Olsen Houses that has proved to be his most masterful project, as well as the most complex of his East Coast residences.[124] For the son's house, located along the rugged shore of the Long Island Sound, Smith looked to Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1929) and produced a simple, self-contained structure based on a six-square grid that he raised upon steel I-beams, or *pilotis*. Fred Jr.'s house was recently saved from the wrecking ball, but the wood and glass home has been rebuilt and restored with such care and high quality materials that the result, while spectacular, is a grandeur that Smith never would have imagined. His father's house remains closer to Smith's original design and construction (fig. 3.9).

For Olsen Sr., Smith began with a distant approximation Le Corbusier's 1950 proposed design for the United Nations General Assembly Building. Dr. Olsen's weekend retreat is sited upon a rocky cliff above his son's house and is a much more complicated arrangement consisting of three separate pavilions that face inward toward the land because Smith wanted "to protect" Olsen and his family from the picturesque view of the Sound.[125] Smith positioned each of the buildings on an arc that moves around a central saltwater swimming pool. Smith preserved a natural grouping of rocks within

[123]Elizabeth Kyburg (Olsen Sr.'s daughter), email message to author, November 25, 2008.
[124] The other East Coast residences that Smith designed and built include the Stamos House in Freeport, Long Island; the Bultman Studio, Provincetown, Massachusetts; Betty Parsons's house and studio, Southhold, New York; and the Scoppettone House, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York.
[125] Elizabeth Kyburg, email message to author, November 25, 2008.

the pool, one of which marks the highest point on the coast and provided Smith with his center point for plotting out the network of structures. Each pavilion is positioned on a different level of the site's rocky terrain, yet is connected to the other two by terraces, walkways and fixed canopies. At the highpoint of the arc is a wooden guesthouse in the shape of a trapezoid, which Smith elevated on wood pylons and made accessible via a ramp (as he intended to do for baptistery of the church project, which he was also working on at the time) (fig. 3.10). Next along the curve is the main house, which is a stone-faced structure, also in the shape of a trapezoid. In the rear of the building, Smith inserted a narrow band of windows, similar to what he intended for the proposed Church project, that offer a panoramic view of the Thimble Islands.

The most compelling structure within the compound to which Smith obviously gave the most thought is the fan-shaped gallery, sited directly opposite the guesthouse, that he designed to house Olsen's collection of paintings (fig. 3.11). With its sloping roof, bank of windows, and voluminous interior space, it resembles the studio Smith had designed for Fritz Bultman a few years earlier. Dr. Olsen had begun collecting avant-garde art in the mid-1940s, and his taste in painting was similar to Smith's. He preferred structural compositions as in the work by lesser-known abstract painters Hans Moller and Jean Xceron, and he also acquired works by Pollock and Still from Art of This Century. By 1950, his collection included paintings by Ludvik Durchanek, Richard Mayhew, Josef Albers, Paul Klee, William Baziotes, and Hans Hofmann. Olsen was also an amateur painter and he used examples from his collection as models for his own painting. The gallery not only housed Olsen's ever-expanding art collection, but it would soon come to include the last of Pollock's mural-sized paintings, *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952* (1952).

Blue Poles offered all the ingredients for the ultimate collaboration between art, artists, architect, and architecture. This includes a long-held story that Smith and Newman participated in the initial stages of the painting. There is probably some truth to this, although it was most likely a matter of Smith and Newman simply squeezing some paint from the tube and on to the canvas rather than making any real aesthetic or

compositional contribution.[126] Pollock's creation of *Blue Poles* coincides with the near completion of Smith's construction of the Olsen Houses, which invites the tempting notion that Smith had the seven-by-eighteen foot canvas in mind for the gallery he designed to adjoin Olsen's new home.[127] Pollock had begun the painting sometime in early 1952 and worked on it intermittently throughout the summer, finishing it two months before its debut at Janis in November. Smith completed the Olsen Houses before he left for Heidelberg in March 1953. It appears that Smith did entertain the idea of persuading Olsen to purchase a large painting from one of his friends. Robert Motherwell later recalled "Tony had built a modern house [along the Connecticut shore] for an industrialist. Tony wanted a wall painting commissioned from me."[128] Instead, Olsen purchased *Blue Poles* from the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1955, yet any possibility of integrating it into the gallery was bound to fail.

According to Fred Jr., *Blue Poles* was made for the west wall of the gallery pavilion, but the painting would have been an awkward fit within the fan-shaped structure. Firstly, while it is one of the last of Pollock's classic drip/pour paintings, it is also the first in which he began to think vertically, as evidenced by the eight vertical "poles" that dominate the viewer's field of vision. Pollock began the painting on the floor but then lifted it to a vertical position against the wall in order to produce the poles, which he did using a two-by-four, the first time he employed a mechanical means with which to make a painting. This was most likely a variation of a compositional device that he had learned from Thomas Hart Benton.[129] Pollock applied each of the individual

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[126] Stanley P. Friedman, "Loopholes in 'Blue Poles,'" *New York Magazine,* 6, no. 44 (October 29, 1973): 48–51. Objections to this article by Thomas B. Hess and Barbara Rose were published in "Letters to the Editor," *New York Magazine*, November 9, 1973.

[127] Tony Smith, letter to Jane Smith, May 28, 1952: "Jackson wants to give you an enormous picture. I haven't seen it, but Barney says it is one of his best. Both Barney and I worked on it a little and Jackson and Barney have signed it and they want me to sign it. . . . The houses in Conn. are going faster. I don't have much energy to keep up with them. I was supposed to go to Conn. this afternoon, but I was too tired." TSEA.

[128] Robert Motherwell. "In Memoriam: Anthony Smith." October 19, 1981. TSEA.

[129] See Stephen Polcari, "Jackson Pollock and Thomas Hart Benton," *Arts Magazine,* 53, no. 7 (March 1979): 120–124.

colors—cream, aluminum, yellow, white, and orange—in single campaigns with the result that each color occupies its own rich and impenetrable layer of color. Although the poles are abstract, there's something representational about the painting. Harold Rosenberg described it as "a weed patch bordered by a barbed wire fence."[130] But even more crucially, the entire west wall consists of a series of angled sections that fan out, making a seamless integration of the large canvas with Smith's architecture impossible (fig. 3.12). At sixteen feet wide, *Blue Poles* would not have fit flush against the wall. In fact, there has even been some debate as to whether *Blue Poles* was installed in Olsen's Guilford, Connecticut, home or his Park Avenue apartment. However, both B.H. Friedman and Ben Heller, who subsequently purchased the painting, have confirmed that the painting was, indeed, installed along the gallery's west wall with Friedman adding that he, Pollock, and Krasner traveled to Guilford together to see *Blue Poles* installed in the gallery.[131] Olsen sold the painting to Heller a mere two years later, in 1957, to pursue his newfound interest in acquiring art of the Pre-Columbian Arawaks.[132] It's not difficult to imagine that he found *Blue Poles* an awkward addition to his new home, but when Heller installed the painting in his New York apartment, he mounted it freestanding between two rooms, similar to the Gellers who had used *Mural* (1950) as a room divider in their home.

Still, Olsen's weekend retreat remained a house for pictures. Although large canvases may have fit awkwardly within the gallery, Smith gave its exterior wall, which faced the pool and patio, an accordion or zigzag shape similar to what he had constructed for a Rothko exhibition a few years earlier at Parsons gallery. Protected by an overhang, Olsen brought selections from his collection out of doors by hanging paintings on this

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[130] Harold Rosenberg, "The Art Object and the Esthetics of Impermanance," in *The Anxious Object* (New York: Horizon Press, 1964), 83.
[131] B.H. Friedman, email message to author, November 13, 2009. Ben Heller, conversation with the author, February 16, 2010.
[132] See Walter Sullivan, "Scientist Seeks Story of Indians Who Greeted Columbus," *New York Times*, April 11, 1958.

zigzag exterior wall where they were protected from the sun by a broad overhang (fig. 3.13.). In this respect, the Olsen house was picture perfect.

Smith in Germany

In the spring of 1953, upon completion of the Olsen Houses and with all hopes for the execution of the Church project dashed, Smith left New York to join his wife, Jane, in Germany, where she had a successful career as an opera singer. He arrived in Heidelberg, spent the late summer in Stuttgart, and toured Italy, France, and Spain that fall. During the years that Newman withdrew from the art world and Pollock practically ceased painting, Smith was visiting architectural sites in Europe. He was especially taken with Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation, his apartment complex in Marseille. While the cohesive group of artists known as abstract expressionists was beginning to fracture, Smith and his wife were settling into Nuremberg where his daughter Chiara (Kiki) Smith was born in January of 1954. On April 1, 1955, he wrote to Newman that he'd seen the painter Buffie Johnson in Salzberg and gathered "that everyone in New York is mad at one another. Smith stayed in Germany for another year and a half, returning to New Jersey in May 1955. While in Europe, he continually worked out ideas for combining painting with architecture, often thinking only of the work of his friends.

Smith found himself isolated in Germany. He did not speak the language, could not find a job, and was unable to find the kind of artistic community in which he had been so active in New York. He wrote somewhat regularly to his friends, Newman in particular, to whom he confessed after describing his loneliness: "I still think of the four of you [Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Still] more than anything else."[133] Lacking a studio as well as any architectural commissions, Smith passed the time making drawings and working on architectural designs that he envisioned building upon his return to the States. The MoMA catalogue, which has the only published material on Smith's work as an architect, lists his 1954 project for a Glass Ranch House, somewhat similar to Philip

[133] Smith, letter to Barnett Newman, February 25, 1954, BNFA.

Johnson's Glass House completed in 1949—although more a variation of Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, also completed in 1949; developing a modular system, which he referred to as the "Metric Proportional Grid" that related architectural production to the human scale. Smith based his theory on a primary unit composed of two meters, which is approximates average human height. Smith believed that standard units of measurement within architecture should be based on human scale, something as we shall see, that was deeply important to Newman as well.

While in Germany, Smith also continually worked on ideas of how he could integrate the paintings of his four closest friends within his architectural designs. He was continually thinking of ways in which their painting might be integrated with his architecture; indeed, their paintings often provided the inspiration for his ideas. He did not keep these ideas to himself, but shared them with his friends, including Pollock and Newman, whose participation and feedback was crucial to him.[134]

In February 1954, he wrote to Newman that he had completed a "house just for pictures" that he called "Une Folie." It was inspired by Newman, who once told him that "someone should build a home that would really be a home for the pictures" as Henry Clay Frick had done for his collection. But unlike the Frick mansion, Smith envisioned a house for pictures in a casual spirit and not at all in a "mausoleum-like" style. In fact, he based it on Newman's Front Street studio.[135] Smith reminded Newman of his first impression of the studio: "Do you remember how excited I was about the pictures on the wall the first day I saw it? How the sloping roof freed the picture from that trapped look of being held by floor and ceiling?"[136] In his "house for pictures," Smith tried to capture the same free quality. To release the paintings implies a formal independence from the wall where the canvases would be trapped between floor and ceiling. Although Smith

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[134] Smith also sent an architectural rendering of his proposed church to Ad Reinhardt who wrote back: "I'm having trouble reading those plans you sent. I know doors and maybe stairs when I see them that way, but I'm not sure of circles and crosses and some squares, especially when they're not in color. . . . I like church plans . . . lately I've been thinking about the cruciform, the cross and plus sign." Ad Reinhardt, letter to Tony Smith, c. 1954, Ad Reinhardt Archives.
[135] Newman moved his studio to 100 Front Street in August 1952.
[136] Smith, letter to Barnett Newman, February 25, 1954, BNFA.

does not elaborate further, given his predilection for Mies at that time, one can imagine what he envisioned: a universal space or open plan in which Smith would have mounted paintings on free-standing panels, similar to what Mies had done in his "Museum for a Small City" and which Peter Blake had emulated with his "Ideal Museum" for Pollock's paintings. The notion of freeing the paintings from the floor and ceiling may also have extended from Frederick Kiesler's gallery design at Art of This Century or even Wright, who, having begun design work on the forthcoming Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, intended that the paintings extend outwards from the walls on poles rather hang flush against the gallery's vertical surface. Alternately, he may have imagined suspending the paintings from the ceiling, which was, in fact a method employed within the only two Mies-designed museums in the world: Cullinan Hall a 1958 addition to the Museum of Fine Arts Houston and, later, the Nationalgalerie in Berlin (1968). Smith was slightly ahead of his time. For the 1958 retrospective of Pollock's work, the Whitechapel, London, installed a number of his paintings upon partitions so that they appeared as freestanding walls. For the Rome venue, the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna actually suspended a few canvases from the ceiling so that they appeared as floating panels.

A few months later Smith wrote Newman about art and architecture again, this time in relation to a Klee/Kandinsky show he'd seen at Munich's Haus der Kunst.[137] He did not especially like the work, but was taken with the gallery and the way in which the paintings were installed. He noted that it was "probably the best hung show" he'd ever seen, and described the Haus der Kunst's gallery to Newman as all white, very long, and about the same height as its width.[138] The paintings, he noted, were placed quite far apart and fairly high upon the wall, but because they were large canvases, they maintained a sense of autonomy rather than homogeneity, which is a risk when you hang a group of pictures in a long row. Instead, he explained, "they exist without fuss—classic and clear. The pictures are just stripped and hung flat. It is a really straight hanging." The installation not only reminded Smith of Newman's studio at the time he hung his pictures

[137] "Thirty Works from 1902–1942, Wassily Kandinsky & Paul Klee," April 16–May 16, 1954.
[138] Smith, letter to Barnett Newman, April 28, 1954, BNFA.

on a tall wall, but "the show as a whole confirmed me in my idea for a church—or as I see now, museum." Adding, "But of course it is easier to get a church built."[139] At this point, Smith began to fold the idea of church into that of a museum. To him, architecturally, they were both the same. And he made it quite clear to Newman that he had no religio-aesthetic aspirations museum cum church building. While the Haus der Kunst reminded him of an idea for a church he was working on at that time, it was not due to a sanctity of space nor a religio-aesthetic aspiration. He made this quite clear to Newman, insisting that the Haus der Kunst was as objective as a public place as a railroad station.

Church of the Way of the Cross

The "church idea" that Smith mentioned to Newman was the one project that he repeatedly revised and refined while in Germany. He wrote Newman about it less than a month after arriving in Germany. He referred to the church as "The Project for a Roman Catholic Church in an 'Ideal' American Landscape," and it was, he claimed, completely unrelated to anything else he had done since he'd begun practicing architecture. Even after his recent Church debacle, Smith believed that this would be an "ideal" building and felt confident that Ossorio could get it built.

Unlike the trapezoidal shape of Bultman's studio, the hexagonal form of Stamos' house as well as the 1950–51 Church project, the cube of Fred Olsen Jr.'s home, or the fan-shaped arrangement of Olsen Sr.'s residence, this church's basic composition was to resemble that of a barn. In fact, Smith had gotten the idea from a quarry shed he had pointed out to Newman on their way to the Olsen job. It was to be a large church set on a cliff between New Haven and the site of the Olsen houses in Guilford.[140] Like the simple quarry shed, he intended a building of just four walls and a sloping roof with gable ends. The roof was to be blue and the interior ceiling flat and of white milk glass that would diffuse the light as well as distract the viewer's gaze from the carrying trusses. The

[139] Ibid.
[140] Smith, letter to Tony Louvis, August 18, 1953. TSEA.

church's interior was to be completely white—white acoustical plaster walls, white rubber-tiled floor, and even white painted pews. He would place the choir over the entry and the main altar—of white marble—in an apsidal recess with sacristies on either side. The exterior was to be clad in large sheets of white marble veneer. For color he intended an enlarged, papier-mâché, three- dimensional version of Matthias Grünewald's Crucifix from the Isenheim Altarpiece (fig. 3.14).[141] In a letter to a friend he explained, "To me there is something in it that the four painters [Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Still] have . . . it's just a natural extension of their paintings."[142]

The most important aspect of the church, indeed his entire reason for designing it, Smith told Newman, was that as "a building . . . as a work of art, paintings would play an integral part."[143] In fact, he claimed that there would be no point in the building at all without a set of particular pictures, which he described to Newman. What Smith envisioned within the spare, white interior, was a suite of fourteen eight-by-ten foot canvases, seven on each side wall, each spaced five feet apart. In this way, "the pictures would be like a procession on either side, until you stood in the aisles in front of them," and presumably, had a more intimate, personal experience. The paintings, he continued, were to be by one artist: "Any four of you [Pollock, Newman, Rothko, Still] would work equally well, and no others would work at all."[144] Smith had prepared a formal description of the church, which he subsequently sent out, accompanied by architectural renderings of his plan, to friends as well as professional architects. In this statement he described the fourteen paintings as abstract paintings, yet symbolic in number and position of the Stations of the Cross.[145] Smith's "Church in an 'Ideal' American Landscape," never attracted a patron, but in February 1958, five years after Smith

[141] See Tony Smith, "Project for a Roman Catholic Church in an'Ideal' American Landscape," July 4, 1953, TSEA.
[142] Smith, letter to Tony Louvis, August 18, 1953. TSEA.
[143] Smith, letter to Barnett Newman, July 5, 1953, BNFA.
[144] Ibid. Ideally, Smith wanted to build four churches; presumably each would feature work by one of the four artists.
[145] Tony Smith, Heidelberg, July 4, 1953 Project for a Roman Catholic Church in an "Ideal" American Landscape. TSEA.

presented him with a proposal for a church dependent upon fourteen canvases and two years of not producing any work, Newman began to stretch the first two of what would ultimately become a series of fourteen paintings. The challenge, he said, was to do a series of canvases of the same size with the same structural limitations as something on the right and something on the left and to create color using only black and white. Newman would title this series of paintings “Stations of the Cross,” which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Barnett Newman: Painting Toward Architecture

Of all the abstract expressionists, Barnett Newman had the greatest interest in architecture. Newman primarily made paintings—and a small number of sculptures—but he also designed a model for a synagogue. Other than Tony Smith, Newman was the only artist of the abstract expressionist group to design an architectural work. Yet even when speaking of his paintings, Newman used terms typically associated with architecture—as a painter, he was involved in issues of size and concerned with the problems of scale. He wanted his paintings to have a physical presence and the viewer to have a kinesthetic experience. He was interested in how the viewer mentally and physically processed the phenomenon of space in the presence of the work. From early on, Newman insisted that a work of art was to explicitly impart a "sense of place," a sense of being in space, with its attending physical and psychological potential. As a result of his investigations into expanding the physical and conceptual limits of the canvas, his paintings came to express qualities analogous to architecture. As Newman increased the size of his canvases and they began to move toward the scale and tectonic opacity of the architectural plane, they also began to mimic the effects of architecture. At times the huge paintings, consisting chiefly of flat surfaces of color, a minimum of gesture, and no trace of figuration, became increasingly difficult to differentiate from the vertical surface on which they were hung.

Tony Smith played an important role in the ongoing development of Newman's interest in architecture. Smith frequently discussed his design projects and thoughts on architectural form and space with Newman. Newman, likewise, shared with Smith his reactions to the different architectural works he had visited and his opinions on their various styles. Newman became especially interested in architecture in the 1950s, particularly synagogue architecture, precisely when Smith was engaged in building his most masterful works as well as working on the Church Project, which was planned to

include a number of Jackson Pollock's paintings. The relationship between Smith and Newman was a rich and long one that until now has not been closely examined.[1]

Born in 1905, Newman was not the oldest artist of the group that would come to be known as the abstract expressionists, but many of his colleagues regarded him as their elder statesman. Like many of his peers, he attended the Art Students League beginning in the 1920s, but he stopped painting by about 1940 and eventually destroyed all of his pre-1945 work. For Newman, as well as many others of that generation, the Second World War, with its attendant horrors of the Holocaust and the atomic bomb, had brought the world to a crisis point. Traditional subject matter and artistic styles now seemed meaningless. Newman later said, "The feeling I had at the time of the War in '41 was that the world was coming to an end. . . . the whole issue of painting, I felt, was over because it was impossible to paint flowers, figures, etcetera, and so the crisis moved around the problem of what can I really paint."[2] Newman was driven to search for a new aesthetic appropriate to the current historical moment. Part of the drive involved writing essays, articles, and letters to editors, and organizing exhibitions as de facto director of the Betty Parsons Gallery. For a time, Newman became better known as pitchman than painter, but his advocacy for new forms ultimately served to position him within in the burgeoning movement that came to be known as abstract expressionism.

Newman befriended many artists over the years, beginning with Adolph Gottlieb, whom he met at the Art Students League, and Milton Avery, whose work he greatly respected.[3] He and Mark Rothko were introduced in 1936, and their friendship solidified when Rothko and Gottlieb asked Newman to "point up" their now well-known

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[1] Joan Pachner, "Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor" (PhD dissertation, New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, 1993), 204n70.
[2] Barnett Newman, unedited transcript of a taped interview with Alan Solomon and Lane Slate, May 20, 1966, preparatory to "Barnett Newman," *U.S.A* series, produced and directed by Lane Slate, National Educational Television, Archives of American Art, Alan Solomon files; quoted in Mark Godfrey, "Barnett Newman's 'Stations of the Cross,'" in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2005), 47.
[3] Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker, 1969), 18.

declaration sent off to the *New York Times'*s Edward Alden Jewell in 1943.[4] Clyfford Still became a friend in 1946 at the time of Still's first show at Parsons. Just a few years later, in April 1950, Newman hailed him as "one of America's authentic painters."[5] But Newman had difficulty maintaining relationships. Soon after his own 1951 show at Parsons, which few people attended and the press reviewed unfavorably, Newman became bitter, jealous, and accusatory, believing that his friends had let him down. He felt slighted again when the Museum of Modern Art did not include him in the 1952 "Fifteen Americans" exhibition and claimed that his friends had not done enough to support his inclusion in the show. He turned against Rothko in the mid-1950s, claiming, privately, that the artist had imitated his paintings and stolen his ideas. He later suggested, publicly, that Still had done the same.[6] His close friendship with Reinhardt suffered an irreparable rift in 1954 over an article Reinhardt had written that Newman felt

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[4] Rothko and Gottlieb responded to Jewell's review of the June 1943 exhibition of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors in which the critic stated that he was baffled by Rothko's and Gottlieb's entries. See Edward Alden Jewell, "Modern Painters Open Show Today," *New York Times*, June 2, 1943, 28. For the artists' response to Jewell's review, see Jewell, "The Realm of Art: A New Platform and 'Globalism' Pops Into View," *New York Times*, June 13, 1943. For an analysis of the artists' original drafts, see Bonnie Clearwater, "Shared Myths: Reconsideration of Rothko's and Gottlieb's Letter to 'The New York Times,'" *Archives of American Art Journal*, no. 1 (1984): 23–25. In gratitude, Rothko and Gottlieb each gave Newman a painting, which were the two paintings that Jewell had attacked in his review—Rothko's *Syrian Bull* and Gottlieb's *Rape of Persephone*.

[5] Newman, "Drafts of a Protest Against Recent Art Criticism and of a Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*, 1950, in *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews,* ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990; 1992), 34 (hereafter cited as *SWI*).

[6] Newman, "Letter to the Editor, *Art News,*" 1965, *SWI*, 225. Newman was also angry with Still for refusing to testify in his defense against Ad Reinhardt who he had taken to court for defamation of character in February 1956. In an article entitled "The Artist in Search of an Academy" which appeared in the Summer 1954 issue of the *College Art Journal*, Reinhardt characterized contemporary artists by types, one of which included "the artist-professor and traveling-design-salesman, the Art-Digest-philosopher-poet and Bauhaus-exerciser, the avant-garde-huckster-handicraftsman and educational-shop-keeper, the holy-roller-explainer-entertainer-in-residence." Newman believed that Reinhardt was referring to him and sued him for libel. When the lawsuit reached the New York Supreme Court it was dismissed and an appeal rejected. Newman later asserted that he had never had a harsh word with either Still or Rothko, nor was there ever any quarrel, which is not entirely true. See Newman "Letters to the Editor (Replies to Robert Motherwell), *Art International,*" 1967, *SWI*, 230.

cast aspersions on his artistic abilities. They had previously been very close friends, with Newman and his wife, Annalee, serving as witnesses at Ad and Rita's City Hall wedding.

Of all the artists whom Newman befriended, he remained closest to Jackson Pollock and Tony Smith. According to Thomas Hess, Newman's early biographer, when Newman began painting seriously in 1945, many considered him a latecomer and, further, found his work either lacking or pretentious. Pollock, however, was one of Newman's early supporters.[7] Newman trusted Pollock. The younger artist helped install Newman's first two shows at Parsons and constructed frames for a number of his narrow 1951 paintings. He also persuaded Newman to include his sculpture *Here I* (1950) in the 1951 show at Parsons. Had Pollock lived longer, their friendship likely would have continued. Instead, it was Newman and Annalee who met Lee Krasner at the airport in 1956 upon Pollock's death in an automobile accident. Eleven years later, at a symposium organized to honor Pollock, Newman protectively proclaimed, "The time has come to praise a colleague, not to bury a hero."[8]

Newman's friendship with Smith lasted the longest. The two met in 1945 in Provincetown, where Newman and Annalee had gone for a summer vacation and where Smith was at work building Fritz Bultman's studio. A year later, in September 1946, Newman asked Smith to help him install an exhibition he had organized for the debut of the Betty Parsons Gallery, "Northwest Coast Indian Painting." Newman became Parsons's unofficial gallery director, and Smith became the gallery's unofficial exhibition designer and over the next ten years would install the gallery's most important shows. Newman trusted Smith and allowed him to install virtually all of his own exhibitions.[9] Like Smith, Newman was also an "uptown" artist, a distinction that Hess assigned to

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[7] According to Thomas Hess, when Pollock visited Newman's studio, he "stared at the pictures intensely, silently, then accepted Newman as a colleague." Hess, *Newman,* 1969, 57.
[8] Newman, "Jackson Pollock: An Artists' Symposium, Part I," 1967, *SWI*, 191.
[9] These include Newman's first two shows at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1950 and 1951, his 1958 retrospective at Bennington College, VT (Newman's first show since his break with Parsons, which Smith and Paul Feeley helped to arrange), his 1959 show at M. Knoedler and Company, New York, his 1969 exhibition at French & Co., New York, and Newman's posthumous retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1971–72.

those artists considered more "intellectual." Their social lives took place uptown, they lived in apartments rather than cold-water flats, their language was analytical, they were interested in philosophy, and they showed with Betty Parsons while the downtown artists showed with Charles Egan. Newman once told Irving Sandler, the chronicler of abstract expressionism, "Tony was involved in our work passionately. . . . For us, Tony was inside our private discussions. We had no inhibitions with him. . . . A man of terrific mind."[10] The two were great friends and both their archives contain files full of their mutual correspondence. In the 1950s, as a sign of his friendship, Newman gave Smith *Galaxy* (1949), one of his first double-banded paintings. Upon Newman's death in July 1970, Smith wrote to Annalee, "Barney was a great and wonderful man. . . . blessed by genius, intelligence, love, and a divine goodness."[11] Smith later designed Newman's headstone, of black African marble, which resembles one of the modular and monolithic sculptures he was making at the time, specifically *The Wall* (1964) (fig. 4.1).

Although their ongoing conversation was certainly crucial to his development, Newman had been interested in architecture even before he and Smith became friends. Newman was intellectually curious by nature and explored a range of subjects including philosophy, photography, botany, and ornithology. Like Smith, Newman considered himself a "Renaissance man," involved in a variety of disciplines and with a variety of interests. Robert Murray—who had been Newman's student in the late 1950s and later his studio assistant, and who was also a friend and colleague until the time of Newman's death—recently confirmed that Newman was very knowledgeable about architecture and, not surprisingly, had strong opinions about what was good and what was bad.[12] Newman's interest in architecture may have begun in 1929 when his brother, George—for whom he later painted the magisterial *Shining Forth (to George)* (1961)—embarked on a career as an architectural draftsman when their father's clothing firm began to fail

[10] Newman in Irving Sandler interview notes, n.d. Irving Sandler Papers, ca. 1914–2001, Getty Research Institute, Research Library.
[11] Undated letter in "Tony Smith" file. Barnett Newman Foundation Archives, New York (hereafter cited as BNFA).
[12] Robert Murray, conversation with author, September 8, 2008.

following the 1929 stock market crash. In the 1940s and 50s Newman gave his friends walking tours of downtown Manhattan's architectural sites and also wrote about a selection of the city's landmarks. In 1955 he drove to Chicago to look at buildings done in the Chicago School style.[13] When he was in São Paulo for the Eighth Bienal, Newman impressed reporters with his knowledge of the Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer. In fact, he was knowledgeable about the work of Frederick Kiesler, R. Buckminster Fuller, Richard Meier, Percival Goodman—architects with whom he was personally acquainted—and Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier too—both of whom Newman may have also met. In the 1960s he watched Mies-like skyscrapers rise before him from the windows of his Front Street studio, from which he would soon be evicted so that the new buildings could take its place. Newman was not happy about the destruction of his neighborhood and before his eviction documented his Front Street neighborhood with photographs of what was fast becoming an outdated, old New York. Indeed, the buildings that Newman admired included both old and new architecture, and in this appreciation he found an ally and mentor in Smith.

Newman had an epiphanic moment in 1948 with a work he later recognized as his "first" painting, and which he eventually titled *Onement I*. *Onement I* represents a departure from the drawings and paintings he had made over the previous four years, which referenced biological or botanical forms and occasionally evoked surrealist themes. In contrast, *Onement I* does not suggest anything representational. It is a smallish painting (twenty-seven by sixteen inches), a maroon surface with a feathery, textured band of orange running up its center.[14] Newman made the band by placing a length of masking tape down the middle of the canvas and brushing paint loosely over it. This initiated the vertical (and occasionally horizontal) band, which became emblematic of Newman's work. Almost every painting that Newman would make over the next twenty-two years features a configuration of single or multiple bands alternating with larger

[13] Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1978), 235.
[14] The was not the first painting that Newman had made with vertical bands running the length of the canvas, but *Onement I* was the first "zip" painting in which all three parts appeared congruently in a single field, rather than as individual bands that divided a receding ground.

fields of flat color. The bands span the full height of the canvas, and Newman insisted that the bands were individual color planes that united, not divided, the canvas. "A field between two other fields" is how he agreed one could describe them.[15] Nor did he think of them as superficial strips, stripes, or any other decorative element. The bands are now commonly referred to as "zips," although Newman did not use the term until almost twenty years later, in 1966.[16] Before this, he usually described them as "stripes." In a 1965 interview, he and David Sylvester discuss "simple lines."[17] Some referred to them as "bands." In England, a zipper, which joins two edges of fabric, is known as a zip. "Zip" also confers speed, and as Arthur Danto points out, Newman's "zip" may refer to the sound that masking tape makes when it is pulled away from the canvas.[18]

Newman had his first exhibition in January 1950 at the Betty Parsons Gallery. He presented a total of eleven paintings, all post-*Onement I*.[19] Each work differed in size and composition in terms of the placement of the zips, each varied in color, but all presented a more or less flatly painted and uninflected surface. The pictures hung like floating planes of color, descending from metal rods attached to a picture rail located just inches from the ceiling. The larger canvases were hung low, close to the floor and well within the viewer's space. Compared to his forthcoming works, none of the eleven paintings were exceptionally big. Yet Hess, who attended Newman's debut exhibition, reported that the paintings on view were "radically large for their time; indeed they stunned most spectators, who were still accustomed to easel-size canvases from American artists."[20] The stark environment of Parsons combined with the paintings' flat fields of evenly applied monochromatic color made the canvases appear even larger than they actually

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[15] See Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester," 1965, *SWI,* 256.
[16] Newman "A Conversation: Barnett Newman and Thomas B. Hess," 1966, *SWI*, 278.
[17] Newman "Interview with David Sylvester," 1965, *SWI*, 255.
[18] Arthur Danto, "Barnett Newman and the Heroic Sublime," *The Nation*, 274 (May 30, 2002), http://www.thenation.com/doc/20020617/danto (accessed July 29, 2009).
[19] For a detailed account of Newman's 1950 exhibition, see James Lawrence, "New Information on Barnett Newman's Exhibition History," *The Burlington Magazine* 150, no. 1264 (July 2008): 473–477.
[20] Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 69.

were. Viewers were baffled and bewildered by what they saw.[21] With his next exhibition, Newman sought to clarify his intentions.

Newman's next show took place at Parsons a year later, in the spring of 1951, and included his largest works to date. At this point, the art-viewing public was becoming more accustomed to seeing large canvases. Four months earlier, Pollock had debuted his three monumental (and still most celebrated) canvases in the same gallery: *Number 28, 1950* (5 feet, 8 inches by 8 feet, 9 inches), *Number 30, 1950* (now known as *Autumn Rhythm*) (8 feet, 10 1/2 inches by 17 feet, 8 inches), and *Number 31, 1950* (later called *One*) (8 feet, 10 inches by 17 feet, 6 inches). And just a week before, on the gallery's north wall, Rothko had shown a ten-foot canvas. On this same wall, Smith, who installed the show, hung Newman's epic *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950–51) (fig. 3.1). At eight by nearly eighteen feet, the painting occupied the wall almost in its entirety.

For the 1951 show Newman selected eight canvases and, at the urging of Pollock, one sculpture to exhibit. None of the paintings, with the exception of *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, were exceptionally large, although the majority measured eight feet high. A freestanding wall, which Smith had built for Rothko's exhibition a month earlier and was retained for Newman's installation, divided the gallery in half to create two rooms roughly fifteen by twenty feet each. When Emily Genauer, the *Herald Tribune*'s art critic, first walked into the exhibition space, she confused Newman's paintings with walls. In her review she made clear, in case other viewers had a similar experience, that "they are not, as one might think on first entering the gallery, handsomely painted walls against which pictures would probably look beautiful. These *are* the pictures."[22] This was not out of ignorance. Genauer was a sophisticated viewer, but when she first crossed the gallery's threshold, she saw a group of paintings that might easily have been mistaken

[21] According to Betty Parsons, the response to Newman's second show was one in which "the paintings continue to baffle and bewilder." Parsons in a letter to Clyfford Still, May 11, 1951, Betty Parsons Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter cited as AAA).

[22] Emily Genauer, "Art and Artists: Super-Realistic Old and Nearly Blank Modern Art Both 'Fool the Eye,'" *New York Herald Tribune*, May 6, 1951.

for walls, consisting as they chiefly did of flat surfaces of color, a minimum of gesture, and no figuration. On her right, she saw *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, which fit snugly between the baseboard's molding and the ceiling's soffit. Directly in front of her, Smith had placed *The Voice* (1950), a predominantly white painting that stood eight feet tall and stretched nine feet across the approximately fifteen-foot wall on which it was hung. To her left, on the freestanding wall, hung *The Wild* (1950), an eight-foot-tall by half-inch-wide painting that would have appeared to Genauer as a single band of cadmium red against a stark white wall. Brian O'Doherty later remarked that because *The Wild* mimics a stripe found in one of Newman's larger canvases, it "may call the wall to witness its possible status, i.e., that it makes the wall part of the painting."[23] Years later Allan Kaprow would observe that Newman's paintings are so flat that it is only the zip that distinguishes the painting "from a flat coat of paint on a wall."[24] There is also a structural tension within Newman's paintings that either the single zip or recurring zips create in the expanded pictorial field, as well as the fact that the zips mimic the rectangular shape of the canvas. Dore Ashton remarked upon this when she attended Newman's 1959 show at French & Co., which included work from 1946 to 1952: "It is the kind of tension projected by architecture. We experience a gracefully scaled ceiling and wall with pleasure. In the same way, it is an experience to encounter an overwhelming field of navy blue, stretching on and on, and giving different weights to its three major shapes, or, as the case may be, intervals."[25]

As she moved through the 1951 exhibition Genauer would have seen *The Wild* in close company with Newman's first sculpture, *Here I*, two narrow freestanding eight-foot-high white plaster columns placed upon a milk crate. And what was behind her? There was a bare wall, yet one that Parsons had earlier painted a dark green, which undoubtedly caused Genauer to wonder, at first glance, was she was looking at one of Newman's paintings, or was it actually a real wall?

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[23] Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko," *Art International* 14, no. 8 (October 20, 1970): 37.
[24] Allan Kaprow, "Impurity," *Art News* 61, no. 9 (January 1963): 54.
[25] Dore Ashton, "Art: A Change in Style, Newman Shows Paintings at French & Co. in the First Exhibition Here Since 1951," *New York Times,* March 12, 1959.

Newman recognized that his paintings puzzled viewers who attended his first exhibition, so for his second show he decided to post instructions on how to look at the work.[26] He had a typed notice tacked to the gallery's entranceway that advised visitors, who were perhaps only accustomed to viewing murals at this size, "There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance."[27] It was for this reason that he decided to retain the wall Smith had installed in the middle of the gallery for Rothko's exhibition as a way to hang more paintings. In Newman's show the wall served to enforce a direct confrontation between the viewer and his largest painting. Although smaller paintings might also invite the viewer to approach, the typical "closer inspection" involves a cerebral and predominantly visual experience, such as when examining a work by Vermeer. With the 1951 installation of *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, Newman both asked and required the viewer to move in closely and traverse its expanse physically; he understood that it was impossible to ocularly apprehend an eight-by-eighteen-foot canvas all at once and in its entirety. Similar to Pollock and Rothko, Newman was attempting to alter the relationship between viewer and work of art. Rather than perceive his paintings on a purely visual basis, Newman wanted the visitor to experience his paintings bodily as well. In other words, he sought to shift the perceptual experience of pictorial space to that of a physical encounter with actual space, which was a radical contribution to the history of art.

Newman used photography to illustrate the way in which a viewer should ideally apprehend his paintings. In 1958 Paul Juley took a photograph of Newman and an unidentified woman facing and directly in front of his eight-by-eighteen-foot *Cathedra* (1951) in his Front Street studio (fig. 4.2).[28] Newman repeated this didactic exercise with

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[26] Greenberg described reactions as such in "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 103 (hereafter cited as *CEC*).
[27] Newman, "Statement," 1951, *SWI*, 178.
[28] The 2002 Philadelphia Museum of Art *Barnett Newman* exhibition catalogue credits the photographer as Peter Juley as does their 2005 publication, *Reconsidering Barnett Newman* (the printed edition of the museum's symposium held in conjunction with the artist's 2002 retrospective), which is impossible since Juley had died in 1937. Instead, it was his son, Paul

a photograph of two viewers looking at *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* close up, when it was on view that year at Bennington College in Vermont. In a third photograph, he placed Annalee just inches away from his white-on-white canvas *The Voice*. The fact that there are several of these photographs and that the spectators were so carefully placed in front of the paintings leaves little doubt that they were prearranged.[29] Newman also liked double-exposures, perhaps because they illustrated the notion of his paintings "embodying" the viewer. In a 1950 photograph taken by Aaron Siskind at Parsons, the image of *Covenant* (1949) is superimposed directly over an image of Newman's body, so that the artist appears literally as one with the painting.[30] In 1965 Ugo Mulas repeated the double-exposure technique so that Newman appears twice "within" *Vir Heroicus Sublimus,* at either end of the canvas and directly in line with the zips (fig. 4.3).[31]

Whether Newman intended the photographers to capture him within his paintings in this way or not, the images are apt illustrations of the intended effect of his paintings: to absorb the viewer's entire field of perception. As Robert Murray described his experience of *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, with its bands that both activate the field of red and simultaneously repeat the rectilinear shape of the canvas, "When you stand in front of the

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(1890–1975), who took the photograph. Peter A. Juley and Son headed the largest and most respected fine arts photography firm in New York from 1906 to 1975. Their clients included major artists, galleries, museums, and private collectors of the period. Their collection of 127,000 photographic negatives is now with the Photograph Archives at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC. See *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 41. Yve-Alain Bois suggests that the unidentified woman may be Dorothy Miller. Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2005), 42–43.

[29] Yve-Alain Bois argues that because viewers stare at Newman's canvases obliquely rather than straight ahead, everything in the artist's paintings counts, not just the zips. Bois, "Newman's Laterality," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, 29–45.

[30] See *Barnett Newman*, Philadelphia, 2002, 18–19. Siskind had also taken at least three installation photographs of Newman's first exhibition at Parsons's Gallery. In one of them, Newman is contemplating the largest work in the exhibition, *Be I* (1949), an Indian red canvas with a narrower than usual zip that runs down its center. The painting was almost eight feet tall and more than six feet wide. Yet rather standing in front of the canvas, he placed himself approximately eight feet in front of it, which is its height.

[31] See *Barnett* Newman, Philadelphia, 2002, 46.

painting, you are in it."[32] The double-exposures also recall Pollock's famous statement about his process, "When I am in my painting I am not aware of what I'm doing."[33] Newman, however, wanted the viewer to be very aware.

By way of comparison, the flat, uninflected expanse of many of Newman's paintings recall some of Robert Rauschenberg's early works, especially his multipanel White Paintings, which Rauschenberg made in 1951, following Newman's show at Parsons. Where Newman's paintings involved the spectator kinesthetically, Rauschenberg's were meant to register and reflect the environment in which they were installed, including the shadows of people as they walked by them. As he later said, "They had to do with shadows and the projection of things in a room onto the blank whiteness."[34] One might say that Rauschenberg reinvented Newman's vertical zips, which are often symbolically equated with an upright person, by activating the surfaces of the White Paintings with traces of the real presence of the spectator.

Newman's paintings, however, have little to do with Zen-inspired registering and receiving. Many equated their oceanic size and vast swathes of near monochromatic color with the sublime. The sublime as an aesthetic category was of great interest to many of the abstract expressionists, Newman included, who in 1948 wrote an article for *Tiger's Eye* entitled "The Sublime Is Now."[35] In 1961 Robert Rosenblum published "The Abstract Sublime" in *Art News,* in which he described *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* as "a void as terrifying, if exhilarating, as the arctic emptiness of the tundra."[36] Another viewer who experienced Newman's large paintings, Don David, felt differently. Writing to the editor

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[32] Robert Murray, statement in Jeanne Siegel, "Around Barnett Newman," *Art News* 70, no. 6 (October 1971): 61.
[33] Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," *Possibilities* (Winter 1947–48). Quoted in Claude Cernuschi, *Jackson Pollock: Meaning and Significance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 105.
[34] Robert Rauschenberg in Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 65.
[35] Newman, "The Sublime Is Now," 1948, *SWI*, 170–173.
[36] Robert Rosenblum, "The Abstract Sublime," *Art News* 59, no. 10 (February 1961): 38–41. Reprinted in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique,* ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 239–244. Newman did, in fact, title one of his paintings *Tundra* (1950).

of *Art News*, David claimed, "When I stand in front of a Newman, I am absolutely not conscious of being before a 'void'—it is obviously a colored wall which shuts off the real void."[37] Indeed, a "void," Newman would have argued, is just another form of space, albeit a sort of nonspecific space. He was more interested in having his paintings establish a definitive sense of place. He achieved this through scale.

Newman's paintings are planar and congruent with the wall's vertical surface, yet they invite the viewer to approach them as if they were three-dimensional objects. Richard Serra, a sculptor deeply aware of the experiential qualities of sculpture, explained, "In Newman's paintings space and mass, which are formed between the vertical divisions, are experienced as you walk or scan the field."[38] Robert Murray, who makes sculpture, said that his experience of Newman's paintings led to "a desire on my part to have people experience a piece of sculpture the way I reacted to his large paintings."[39] Even Robert Mangold, a painter, sensed a particular physical relationship to the viewer in Newman's work, which inspired him to make art "you relate to like architecture."[40] Mangold responded to the scale of Newman's paintings, which he felt was related to human size, as well as their material straightforwardness. He thought of his own architectural relief paintings, such as *Gray Window Wall* (1964), a planar object that sat directly on the floor, as "crossing the border between painting and sculpture."[41] Mangold actually used some of the less successful paintings from this early period as walls.

Mangold was responding to the physical presence that Newman's paintings possess, particularly the broad ones, which is due in large part to their wide expanses of uninterrupted color. For many of these bigger canvases, including *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, *Tundra* (1950), *Day One* (1951, 1952), *Anna's Light* (1968), and the four *Who's Afraid of*

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[37] Don David, "Letter to the Editor," *Art News* 67, no. 7 (November 1968): 5.
[38] Richard Serra, *Writings, Interviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 280.
[39] Murray, in Siegel, "Around Barnett Newman," 62.
[40] Robert Mangold, unpublished studio note, November 30, 1993. Quoted in Richard Shiff, "Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect," in *Barnett Newman*, Philadelphia, 2002, 99.
[41] Mangold in David Carrier, "Mangold's 'Gray Window Wall,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 138, no. 1125 (December 1996): 827.

Red, Yellow, and Blue (1966-1970), he chose to use dark orange or cadmium red for the larger color zones. He next turned to darker blues in the early through mid-1950s with *Cathedra*, *Day Before One* (both 1951), *Ulysses* (1952), and *L'Errance* (1953). He also used grayish green, which seems particular to the 1950s; a pale sea-foam green appears in great swathes in *The Gate* (1954) and *Uriel,* as well as in a number of smaller canvases. He was not afraid to use white on white, as he did in *The Voice* and *Name II* (1950), and in the late 50s through the mid-60s he challenged himself to create color with noncolor in the fourteen canvases of *The Stations of the Cross* (1958–66), a series of black and/or white paint on raw canvas. In the 1960s he returned to a more frequent use of cadmium red, which was his preferred color. Within all of these paintings Newman strategically placed anywhere from one to five zips, which could be markedly distinct from or occasionally close in hue to the canvas's dominant color. Some of the zips have straight, clean edges; others are ragged and brushy, depending upon how he laid the paint down over the length of masking tape. While it may be difficult for some viewers to grasp, Newman thought of the zips—which varied in width from broad to slender—as individual planes simply contiguous to the broader planes within the canvas.[42] They are meant to unite, not divide, the painting, resulting in a single, total image. "Wholeness" is a consistent theme within Newman's paintings.

In the late 1940s and into the mid-1950s, Newman thinned out his oil paint to such an extent that it is often possible to see his initial application of a white undercoat. Some of his earlier canvases have a brushy-looking, agitated surface, but for the most part, his surfaces appear smooth and uninflected. This is especially true of his later works from the 1960s, which led Donald Judd to assume that Newman had used a spray gun to produce the painting, although he only used one occasionally and then only for the undercoat.[43] In the 1960s Newman's layers of paint became increasingly condensed, and

[42] "I feel that my zip does not divide my paintings. I feel it does the exact opposite . . . it unites the thing." Barnett Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio," 1970, *SWI*, 306.
[43] Hess writes that in 1949–52 Newman experimented with a spray gun but found that it was more trouble than it was worth. Hess, *Newman*, 1969, 44. According to Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Newman purchased a spray gun in 1949 and 1958. Further, Annalee Newman confided to Yve-

by the late 1960s he used the paint straight from the tube without first thinning it with turpentine. At the time Elizabeth Baker, a friend of Newman's and editor of *Art in America*, announced, "A new physicality is most apparent in [Newman's] stunningly huge expanses of a single full-strength primary color [which is] less nuanced and less perceptibly worked than before."[44] Similarly, Ann Temkin has described these paintings as having "surfaces unyielding to the eye—like walls of color as impenetrable as the opacity of Pollock's layers of skeined paint."[45]

It was essential to Newman that he eradicate any sense of illusionistic depth or three-dimensional space within his paintings, yet he did not go so far as to stain the canvas with pigment as some later artists such as Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler did. Instead, he prided himself on the degree of opacity and uniformity that he was able to achieve by careful application of individual layers of paint. In 1955 Greenberg, who in a favorable appraisal of his work, wrote that Newman "soaked" or "dyed" the canvas with pigment.[46] Newman corrected him, "You know that my paint quality is heavy, solid, direct, the opposite of a stain."[47]

The materiality of his paintings was extremely important to Newman. He took great care with the materials that went into their making, as well as with his craftsmanship. He carefully stretched and sized his canvases and folded the corners

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Alain Bois that her husband had used a spray gun on *Who's Afraid of Red Yellow and Blue II* and *IV*. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, "The Paintings of Barnett Newman: 'Involved Intuition on the Highest Level,'" in *Barnett Newman*, Philadelphia, 2002, 124.

[44] Elizabeth C. Baker, "Barnett Newman in a New Light," *Art News* 67, no. 16 (February 1969): 40.

[45] Ann Temkin, "Barnett Newman on Exhibition," in *Barnett Newman*, Philadelphia, 2002, 70.

[46] Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, *CEC*, vol. 3, 217–236.

[47] Newman, "Letter to Clement Greenberg," 1955, *SWI*, 203. Greenberg revised "'American-Type' Painting" when he republished it in *Art and Culture* and corrected a number of errors that Newman had pointed out to him in 1955, including the description of Newman's painting process. Greenberg's original version read "like Newman, [Mark Rothko] soaks his pigment into the canvas, getting a dyers effect, and does not apply it as a discrete covering layer in Still's manner." In his revised essay he wrote: "like Newman . . . [Rothko] seems to soak his paint into the canvas to get a dyer's effect and avoid the connotations of a discrete layer of paint on *top* of the surface." Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," *Art and Culture* (1961; Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 225.

around their often handmade stretchers with precision. He experimented with oil paint and acrylic as well as other synthetic pigments such as Magna combined with oil or tempera. Occasionally he worked on unprimed cotton canvas. As Harold Rosenberg noted, "Newman's total break with natural imagery led to his innovating emphasis on the physical rudiments of works of art—in painting, the size, shape, and color of areas of the canvas."[48] The result was that his paintings have a structural quality to them, an "objecthood," as critics in the 1960s would later describe the Minimalists' work. His six tall and narrow paintings from 1950, which include his well-known *The Wild*, are more boxlike than planar, making them objects as much as paintings, especially given that the painted canvas wraps around the edges of the stretchers. But Newman made it clear that he wanted to avoid making an "art object" in the sense of compiling an assortment of beautiful materials. One of his achievements, he claimed, was to have "removed the emphasis of a painting as an object," yet he also recognized that "painting inevitably is a physical object."[49] Here he was trying to distinguish between a traditional "aesthetic object" and a work of art that is inherently a physical object. It is informative to note that when Newman was working on his 1967 sculpture, *Broken Obelisk,* he became "intrigued" with the triangle as possible format for painting. He was not necessarily interested in its shape for shape's sake, he wanted to determine if a triangular painting could function as a work of art and not a mere thing.[50] His paintings are indeed works of art, as well as objects that can be described as "architectonic," which is how Allan Kaprow characterized *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* because of its connotations of structure, three-dimensionality, and perhaps foremost, materiality.[51] Greenberg, who advised

[48] Harold Rosenberg, "Meaning in Abstract Art (Continued)," *The New Yorker* 47, no. 46 (January 1, 1972): 44.
[49] Newman, "Interview with Lane Slate," 1963, *SWI*, 253.
[50] Newman, "*Chartres* and *Jericho*," 1969, *SWI*, 194.
[51] Kaprow, "Impurity," 54.

viewers that they "look *at* and not into" Newman's "pictures," also implies that Newman's paintings live as objects as much as flat visual fields.[52]

A Direct Attack on the Easel Convention

> *Newman's huge and darkly burning pictures constitute the most direct attack yet on the easel convention.*
>
> — Clement Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting,"1955; 1958[53]

Writers have ventured a variety of reasons as to why Newman made such large paintings. According to Hess, if Newman was "to grow at all, his painting had to grow larger," yet he also cites the influence of Newman's critical ambition, competition with his peers, the challenge of working on a large canvas, and the scale of New York and its vertical skyscrapers.[54] Others believe that the size of Newman's paintings can be attributed to the size of his studio, the size of the Betty Parsons Gallery, the affordability of materials, advances in the construction of stretchers that could support such enormous canvases, and the influence of Northwest Coast Indian totem poles and painted house façades "so large and so monumentally simple that Newman saw how they condition the space of the viewer, something that he sought with his own canvases."[55] Ann Temkin

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[52] Greenberg, "Introduction to an Exhibition of Barnett Newman," *Barnett Newman: First Retrospective Exhibition* (Bennington, VT: Bennington College, 1958); *Barnett Newman: A Selection, 1946–1959* (New York: French and Co. 1959). Reprinted in *CEC*, vol. 4, 55. It should be noted that Newman never would have referred to his paintings as "pictures," which implies that they are illusionistic or at least something other than paintings. "Those who make pictures," he told Lane Slate in 1963, "whether realist or abstract, are not making paintings." Newman, "Interview with Slate," *SWI*, 253.

[53] Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, vol. 3, CEC, 232; this quote from the revised version published in *Art and Culture*, 225.

[54] On critical ambition, competition, the challenge of working on a large canvas, and the scale of New York, see Hess, *Newman*, 1969, 52.

[55] Mollie McNickle notes that in August 1950 Newman moved from "his old cramped studio" to a larger loft on Wall Street. Mollie McNickle, "The Mind and Art of Barnett Newman" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 244. As to the size of Parsons's gallery, the dimensions of Newman's paintings increased regardless of whether or not an exhibition space could accommodate them. In 1951, he made two eleven-foot tall paintings, *Day One* and *Day*

submits that Clement Greenberg's "The Crisis of the Easel Picture" (1948) had an "incalculable effect" on Newman and other "artists at the point of their emergence."[56] Greenberg likely wrote the essay in response to Pollock, describing the new, "ambitious" paintings as decentralized, polyphonic, and allover. As Greenberg saw it, traditional easel paintings cut a windowlike, illusionistic cavity into the wall, whereas the new painting extended indefinitely beyond the confines of its edges and across the expanse of the wall upon which it was hung, hence more closely integrating with its architectural environment.[57] Greenberg's description fits Newman's later canvases, but Greenberg was observing, assessing, and being descriptive—not prescriptive—about what he saw happening around him. Years later, Newman explained to Alan Solomon that he began to make large paintings "to see if I could get something that would be . . . 'symphonic' rather than isolated as a single device."[58]

Before One, neither of which fit into Parsons's gallery. On the affordability of materials as well as sophisticated construction methods, see James Lawrence, "Abdication in an Artistic Democracy: Meaning in the Work of Barnett Newman and Donald Judd, 1950–1970 (and thereafter)" (PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2006), 93. According to Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, from the early 1950s onward, Newman built his own stretcher bars rather than use what he deemed less adequate standard equipment. In fact, in June 1958 he filed a patent application for a modular stretcher joint. Drawings exist for the proposed stretcher, but no actual examples. By 1960 he generally favored expandable stretchers as they were better suited to his larger works. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, "Paintings of Barnett Newman," *Newman*, Philadelphia, 2002,118–119. On Northwest Coast Indian Art, see David M. Quick, "Meaning in the Art of Barnett Newman and Three of His Contemporaries: A Study of Content in Abstract Expressionism" (PhD, dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978), 222.

[56] Temkin, "Newman on Exhibition," in *Barnett Newman*, Philadelphia, 2002, 52.

[57] Greenberg, in fact, was one of the first to write on Newman's paintings as concerns their size. In his 1955 summary of the leading abstract expressionists' contributions, he declared that Newman's painting amounted to the most direct attack upon the easel picture, which he attributed to their "huge" size as well as color. He also described these paintings as "aggressive." Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, *CEC,* vol. 3, 232.

[58] Transcript from "Barnett Newman," part of the *U.S.A. Artists* series on National Educational Television, tx. July 12, 1966. Prod. And dir. Lane Slate. Interview conducted by Alan Solomon, May 20, 1966, Thomas Hess papers, AAA, 5028: 585-94, quoted in Lawrence, "Abdication in an Artistic Democracy," 94.

Not all of Newman's paintings are big. In fact, the majority of those completed after *Onement I* are less than five feet on their longest side.[59] But when Newman painted large, the canvases generally stretched eight by eighteen feet, and occasionally larger.[60] Newman's most productive year was in 1949, when he completed a total of eighteen canvases. Several came close to or extended beyond six feet (*Onement III* at 71 7/8 by 33 1/2 inches; *Concord*, 89 3/4 by 53 5/8 inches; *Abraham*, 82 3/4 by 34 1/2 inches; *Horizon Light*, 30 1/2 by 72 1/2 inches; *Argos*, 33 by 71 1/2 inches; *Be I*, 93 1/8 by 75 1/8 inches). The next year, 1950, Newman made even larger paintings (*Tundra*, 71 3/4 by 89 inches; *The Voice*, 96 1/8 by 105 1/2 inches; *The Name*, 104 by 94 1/2 inches; *Eve*, 94 by 67 3/4 inches), including *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, 8 by 18 feet, followed shortly by *Cathedra*, which is the same size.[61] He repeated these dimensions in 1955 with the magisterial *Uriel* and in 1967 with *Voice of Fire*. Into the 1960s he made triangular paintings, *Jericho* (1968–69) and *Chartres* (1969), both eight by nine feet; and his two largest paintings, *Anna's Light* (1968) and *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue IV* (1969–70), which each measure nine by twenty feet. In 1970, at the time of his death, he was at work on a canvas just slightly wider than *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, the first of his large-sized paintings. The size of his studio and the increased availability of affordable materials helped make it possible for Newman to make such large paintings. Perhaps Greenberg's argument that the abstract expressionists, as they flattened the surface of their paintings

[59] It could be argued that even Newman's medium-sized canvases appear larger than they actually are because they lack a central compositional point, which ordinarily draws in the viewer's line of focus. Instead, the viewer's eye scans the painting's surface in search of a pictorial element that it can fasten on to, but finds only the occasional vertical "zip." These vertical bands tend to direct the eye across the surface of the canvas horizontally.

[60] In the 1950s, Newman purchased his canvas in remnants, which were available from John Boyle, on Duane Street in New York. This is the same sail-maker who Pollock purchased his canvas from. Since so many of Newman's paintings from the 1950s measure eight feet in height, this raises the question as to whether the bolts were manufactured at this length. Brad Epley, Chief Conservator, Menil Collection, finds this unlikely and concurs with the author that Newman specifically preferred the eight–foot height. Even if they had manufactured the eight-foot bolts, Newman would have cut the canvas down if he wanted another size, but he chose to keep the eight feet. Brad Epley, conversation with author, March 15, 2010.

[61] Actually dated 1950–51 because Newman added the grayish "zip" on the far right after hearing that President Harry Truman had dismissed General Douglas MacArthur on April 11, 1951.

and so had to work laterally, were "compelled" to paint huge canvases was also a factor.[62] Newman did say of *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue III* that he wanted to see how far he could stretch the red, "I wanted to see if I could pull it out to 18 feet."[63] But more to the point, Newman knew that these large dimensions increased the likelihood that the viewer would experience his paintings phenomenologically, and the experiential meant everything to him.

Newman's paintings often appear larger than their actual physical dimensions because he did not frame his canvases. In fact, in 1954, he claimed that he was one of the first artists to reject the frame.[64] He argued, "Any presentation of my own pictures in a frame would, in effect, mutilate them."[65] In other words, he felt a frame would risk turning one of his paintings into a "picture," which implies a decorative object. An unframed painting emphasized his stance against illusionistic, window-in-the-wall paintings. And because unframed paintings appear more congruent with the wall on which they are hung, they may come to be equated with the architectural surface. Greenberg recognized this possibility in Newman's paintings early on. Although he did not review Newman's first two exhibitions, in his1952 essay "Feeling Is All," he wrote "[Newman's] pictures may not be easel pictures or murals in any accepted sense" and then, as if throwing his arms up in exasperation, conceded, "What do difficulties of category matter?" More importantly, he concluded that "they constitute . . . the first kind of painting I have seen that accommodates itself stylistically to the demand of modern

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[62] Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, *CEC*, vol. 2, 195.
[63] Newman in Hess, *Newman*, 1969, 7.
[64] As Carol Mancusi-Ungaro points out, Newman did find it necessary to frame *Concord* and *Horizon Light*. He disapproved of the frame on *Abraham* because he felt that "it brings a third black element into the painting, which I did not intend." See Newman in letter to Alfred H. Barr, The Museum of Modern Art, August 1959, BNFA. Robert Murray, Newman's friend, colleague, and occasional studio assistant throughout the 1960s recalled that Newman used masking tape to protect the tacking margins while painting. Newman most likely preferred that the sides of the painting be left bare or else covered with unobtrusive masking tape. Murray, conversation with author, September 8, 2008.
[65] Newman was taking issue with James Johnson Sweeney's decision to remove the frame from Cézanne's *Clockmaker* (1899) in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's collection, which Newman argued was as "wrong as cropping any photograph" because it would distort its historical meaning. Newman, "Letter to the Editor, *New York Times Magazine*," 1954, *SWI*, 41.

interior architecture for flat, clear surfaces and strictly parallel divisions."[66] According to Ellen Landau, this statement "contradicts every word Newman ever uttered about the theoretical and philosophical values he attached to artistic creativity."[67] But Greenberg wasn't saying that Newman's work was decorative or that he was a decorator, although the risk was present. Instead, Greenberg was reiterating a point he had made in 1948 about scale. Newman's unframed paintings aligned with Greenberg's description of "a kind of picture that, without actually becoming identified with the wall like a mural, would *spread* over it and acknowledge its physical reality."[68]

Human Scale

Largeness per se had never been important to Newman. He explained this early on, in 1953, when he asked Alfonso Ossorio for the return of one of his tall and narrow paintings, the three-foot-high *Untitled (No. 1)* (1950). Ossorio had it hanging with several large canvases by other abstract expressionist painters, Pollock and Still included. Newman did not think his painting fared well in the company of his colleagues' more sizable work. He told Ossorio, "I have never been involved in tour de force—in size for its own sake," subtly implying that some of his colleagues with their grandiose egos had.[69] His feelings about size never changed. Two months before his death he told the film director Emile de Antonio that as far as he was concerned, a wall-sized painting could still be considered an easel painting, even if it hung in a modern home surrounded by Mies van der Rohe chairs, concluding "A painting can be bigger than anything that can go on an easel and still be, in my opinion, an easel painting."[70] In other words, a

[66] Greenberg, "Feeling Is All," 1952, *CEC*, vol. 3, 104.
[67] Landau argues that Greenberg limited himself to the formal qualities of Newman's paintings thereby ignoring any of the artist's metaphysical intentions for his work. She takes Greenberg's statement to imply that Newman's paintings are merely decorative. Ellen Landau, "Introduction," *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 24.
[68] Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1947, *CEC*, vol. 2, 195.
[69] Newman may have been referring to either Pollock or Clyfford Still. Newman, "Letter to Alfonso Ossorio," 1953, *SWI*, 198.
[70] Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio," 1970, *SWI*, 307.

painting could be monumental in size, yet this did not preclude it from being a meaningless, decorative object designed for a fashionable bourgeois home. The artist strove to clarify the nature of his paintings to de Antonio, specifically the large ones, and emphasized, "In the end, size doesn't count. . . . It's scale that counts."[71] He had said something similar in the mid-1960s, when the interviewer Andrew Hudson compared the size of his paintings to Pollock's:

> I have never been interested in size for its own sake. Pollock and I were the first (and it's interesting that it happened in the same year) to move our paintings into a *sense* of the large size. I think the problem is to transcend size, or better still, to overcome it. There are many artists, beginning with men of my own generation, who have since been doing immense paintings. But size is not enough. I know of some who do large paintings, yet no matter how large they are, they are fundamentally small in scale, and there are others who do large paintings that are never large enough. . . . The real problem of a painting lies in the painter's sense of scale.[72]

"Sense" is the operative word here. What Newman was trying to explain is that size is objective, that is, size is simply a matter of measurement. Scale, on the other hand, is a felt thing and a thing to be arrived at intuitively rather than prescribed, which is why he told Hudson that he and Pollock had "moved" their work toward a "sense" of largeness. He once defined scale to Pierre Schneider, the French art critic, while standing in front of Paolo Uccello's six-by-ten-foot *Battle of San Romano* (c. 1435–40). He told Schneider that it had a "fantastic sense of scale" and that it looked big because the content and form were inseparable. "That's scale," he explained. He was similarly impressed by Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819), which measures sixteen by twenty-three feet:

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Newman, "'The Case for 'Exporting' Nation's Avant-Garde Art': Interview with Andrew Hudson," 1966, *SWI*, 271–272.

"Fantastic! The scale is marvelous. You *feel* the immensity of the event rather than the size of the canvas."[73] In Newman's work there is obviously no representation or figuration other than the vertical zips; the paintings themselves and the viewer's experience of them constitute the event. With no incident within the pictorial field other than a vertical zip (or zips)—and with the fact that the verticality of the zip relates to the architecture of the room—the viewer can't help but to sense his or her own size relative to the painting, thus activating an awareness of one's own physical being in space. The distinction between scale and size was crucial for Newman because scale set in motion a sensorial, physical response to his work, whereas the size alone of a canvas did not necessarily trigger the same response. And it was not merely a general sense of scale that Newman sought to achieve in his paintings, but that of a human scale.

Of the 114 paintings that Newman completed between *Onement I* and the time of his death in 1970, only four of them have horizontal zips, and these all date from 1949. This suggests that Newman recognized early on that the vertical zip was the most efficacious in creating the sense of scale he sought to achieve. He often spoke of "human scale" in relation to his paintings, and the vertical zips encourage this sensation because they are scaled relative to a standing, upright person. Many, although certainly not all, of Newman's large-sized canvases measure eight feet tall. His first monumental canvas, *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*, measures eight feet high, as does an unfinished canvas that he was working on in July 1970 at the time of his death.[74] In the 1950s Newman purchased his canvas in remnants from John Boyle & Co., the same sailmaker on Duane Street in downtown New York from whom Pollock purchased canvas. Many of Newman's paintings from the 1950s measure eight feet in height. While Newman thought of himself as a spontaneous painter who approached his canvas without any predetermined ideas or preparatory drawings, he did go through an intuitive preliminary process. Before he could

[73] Newman "'Through the Louvre with Barnett Newman,' by Pierre Schneider," 1968, *SWI*, 300.
[74] The painting may even have resembled *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* also in color. The center of the unfinished painting, which encompassed almost a third of the canvas, had been painted red and the sides were primed with a white ground in anticipation of a lighter red that Newman planned to apply. Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 146.

begin to put paint on the surface of the canvas, he had to have first found his proportions and dimensions, for "until he arrived at them, he was nowhere."[75] Eight feet was a physical dimension that he felt comfortable with. In addition to many of his paintings, it is also the height of two of his vertical, "zip-like" sculptures, *Here I* and *Here I (To Marcia)* (1950/1962). Newman was five feet nine inches tall; eight feet was beyond his reach, but it is the average height of typical architectural components such as doorways and ceilings. Eight feet in architecture is a height that developed relative to the scale of a human body. Newman preferred to have his larger paintings hung close to the floor to convey the sense that they were rooted in the same physical plane as the viewer rather than floating upon the blank vertical surface of the wall. "You feel his paintings in your feet," the painter and sculptor Ellsworth Kelly once said.[76]

In 1950 Newman made six narrow paintings that range from three feet to eight feet high and one inch to six inches wide. It was as if Newman was varying the sizes in order to determine the most effective scale for his purpose. The one painting from this group that he exhibited most frequently during his lifetime and spoke of most often is *The Wild*, an approximately eight-foot-tall by one-inch-wide band of cadmium red with a sliver of gray-blue on either side. Newman later told Hess that he did it to "test" himself, "to see whether I was just being beguiled by these big expanses of color. I did a painting eight feet high by one and a half inches wide to see if I could make that narrow space. . . . to see if it could contain the sense of scale I was involved in and also that it could have the *feeling* that my big paintings have."[77] In 1951 Hans Namuth photographed Newman and Parsons standing against the wall next to *The Wild,* as if they were measuring

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[75] Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 68.
[76] Ellsworth Kelly quoted in Michael Auping, "Four Horizons," in *Declaring Space: Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein* (Fort Worth: Modern Art Museum, 2007), 148.
[77] Transcript from "Barnett Newman," part of the *U.S.A. Artists* series on National Educational Television, tx. July 12, 1966. Prod. And dir. Lane Slate. Interview conducted by Alan Solomon, May 20, 1966, Thomas Hess papers, AAA, 5028: 585–94, quoted in Lawrence, "Abdication in an Artistic Democracy," 94.

themselves against the narrow canvas in an object lesson of the human scale of the eight-foot painting (fig. 4.4).

Artists and critics alike have claimed that Newman's sense of scale was one of his great achievements. In 1964 Judd wrote admiringly:

> It's important that Newman's paintings are large, but it's even more important that they are large scaled. His first painting with a stripe, a small one, is large scaled. The single stripe allowed this and the scale allowed the prominence and assertion of the stripe and the two areas. This scale is one of the most important developments in the twentieth-century art.[78]

Other writers also singled out Newman's scale as a major innovation. Peter Plagens maintained, "Scale is Newman's greatest formalist contribution to modern painting."[79] David Anfam, an authority on abstract expressionist painting, wrote that "Newman exploited a new notion of scale."[80] The scale of Newman's paintings was radical because it radically altered the viewer's relationship to the canvas. Newman's engagement of the viewer went beyond the simply visual to establish a corporeal relationship with the work as well. Newman may have derived his sense of human scale and how a physical being might relate to the canvas from his knowledge of architecture, as well as his friendship with Tony Smith.

Human scale has a range of meanings, but generally refers to an object or environment close in size to the human body. If something is of human scale, it engenders a feeling that one can relate to one's surroundings rather than feel superior to

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[78] Judd also recognized that Pollock was involved in the problem of scale first and that Newman developed his own notion in 1950. A few others (unnamed) later came to recognize its importance. Judd's essay was not published until 1970. Donald Judd, "Barnett Newman," *Studio International* 179, no. 919 (February 1970). Reprinted in *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 200–02.

[79] Peter Plagens, "Zip: Another Magazine Article on Barnett Newman," *Art in America* 59, no. 6 (November–December 1971): 63.

[80] David Anfam, "Barnett Newman," *Oxford Art Online*, www.oxfordartonline.com

or alienated by the size of an object or environment. Many architects have developed proportional systems based on the scale of the human body in relation to architecture, Smith included. In 1954, while living in Germany, Smith worked on a system that he referred to as the "Metric Proportional Grid," which he likely derived from Le Corbusier's Modulor Man. Le Corbusier developed his Modulor system between 1943 and 1955, at a time when there was widespread fascination with mathematics as a potential source of universal truths, an idea which would have appealed to both Smith and Newman. Le Corbusier published *Le Modulor* in 1950 and *Modulor II* in 1955. He developed his Modulor theory in the spirit of Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, and other systems that used the proportions of the human body as a guide to both the aesthetics and function of architecture. The purpose of the Modulor, Le Corbusier claimed, was to "maintain the human scale everywhere." He based his schematic of the Modulor on a 183-centimeter (approximately 6-foot) man with his arm upraised to a height of 226 centimeters (7 1/2 feet), which he inserted into a rectangle. The ratio of the height of the man (183 cm) to the height of his navel or midpoint (113 cm) precisely followed the Golden Ratio. Le Corbusier's Modulor was designed to provide a system of standardization that would ensure harmonious proportions in everything from ceiling heights to the sizes of door handles, and from individual buildings to open urban spaces. He based his designs for the Unité d'habitation in Marseille (1947–52) and Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp (1950–54) on the Modulor system.

Smith devised a similar type of system in which the architectural environment was related proportionally to the human figure. He based his system on a 2-meter, or 6 1/2-foot, man, slightly taller than Le Corbusier's Modulor Man and 6 inches taller than the height of an average man in the 1950s. Yet like Le Corbusier, Smith was interested in determining a standardized system by which architecture would be brought into harmony with the functional as well as psychological needs of its occupants through the application of a sort of essential human scale. Although his architectural projects show no direct evidence of such a system, a number of his early sculptural works, which mark his transition from architecture, measure eight feet high, a height that is decidedly human

in scale. These include *The Elevens Are Up* (1963), *The Wall* (1964)—which at eight by eighteen feet has the exact dimensions of Newman's most successful large-scale paintings—*The Keys to. Given!* (1965) and a design he composed for an outdoor piazza in 1964 in which the sculptural elements measure eight feet. But his most well-known piece, *Die* (1962), a six-foot, three-dimensional rendition of the proportions of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, perhaps best confirms Smith's interest in experimenting with artworks that echo human scale in real space.[81]

Space, Place, and Time

> *To my mind the basic issue of a work of art, whether it is architecture, painting, or sculpture, is first and foremost for it to create a sense of place, so that the artist and the beholder will know where they are.*
>
> —Barnett Newman, 1967[82]

Newman's notion of scale was intimately linked with his conception of place. He did not construe "place" as a specific site or locus, as Carl Andre would with his 1960s floor pieces, but rather he associated it with the sensorial, psychological, and experiential.[83] If one experienced an awareness of one's physical being while in front of

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[81] Yve-Alain Bois argues that Smith had no real interest in scale with the exceptions of *Die* and *The Elevens Are Up*, which he finds perfectly proportioned. He primarily takes issue with what he finds to be Smith's inability to enlarge his small-scale models to large-sized examples. He writes, "this inattention to scale - so much at odds with both the aesthetics of Smith's intimate friend Barnett Newman (who never made a sketch for a painting) and that of the younger Minimalist sculptors (for whom over-scaling was a way of sidestepping the issue of formal complexity) confirms that Smith was, as he said himself and as various authors in the [Museum of Modern Art, 1998] catalogue report, a designer at heart. Bois, "Matters of Scale, Renaissance Pan," *Artforum* 37, no. 3 (November 1998): 88.

[82] Newman, "Response to the Reverend Thomas F. Mathews," 1967, *SWI*, 289.

[83] Milton Resnick, a colleague of Newman who was active in the artistic arguments and exchange of ideas that took place among abstract expressionist painters in the late 1940s and 50s also spoke of "place" in regard to his paintings, although his concept is more closely related to actual location. In the late 1950s he began painting canvases that measured ten by twenty-five feet and upwards. In speaking of these paintings he stated "It isn't canvas that you approach for your focusing. It is a place. And this place can be, by coincidence, where your canvas is . . . A very important part of this whole thing lies in whether this canvas, which becomes this place—also

one of his paintings, this in turn would create what Newman described as "a sense of place," where a person would know that "he's there . . . he's aware of himself."[84] This occurs because there's no illusion or representation in his paintings that might provide the viewer with an outlet or opportunity to wander elsewhere. Confronted with one of Newman's paintings, one is almost forced to remain in place before the work—physically, intellectually, and psychologically. Newman's understanding of existentialism may have informed his conception of place. In existential terms, place implies an idea of the philosophical confrontation of an individual with the totality of human existence and the conditions of this existence. Following the Second World War, existentialism became an influential philosophical and cultural movement, in large part through the diffusion of the writings and lectures of Jean-Paul Sartre.[85] Articles on Sartre appeared in mainstream publications such as the *New Yorker* and *Harper's Bazaar* as well as avant-garde journals such as *View*. Newman was aware of Sartre's essays, which appeared frequently in journals in English translation around this time such as the *Partisan Review*.[86] He was also likely aware of the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose well-known essay "Cézanne's Doubt" appeared in English translation in 1946, also in the *Partisan Review*. As Newman explained to David Sylvester in 1965 in relation to his notion of place, "I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did to me, the feeling of his

becomes a world." Milton Resnick in Geoffrey Dorfman, *Out of the Picture: Milton Resnick and the New York School* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2003), 142.

[84] Newman, "Interview with Sylvester," 1965, *SWI*, 257. Richard Serra equates Newman's sense of place with "the sublime and with a moment of finding the self as opposed to losing the self in immensity or placelessness" with which Richard Shiff agrees. See Shiff, "White-Out," *Newman*, 2002, 106n59.

[85] Jean-Paul Sartre arrived in the United States in January 1946 where he conducted a brief but widely publicized lecture tour that included Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia Universities. He also spoke to a full house at New York's Carnegie Hall where his lecture had been arranged by Charles Henri Ford, the editor of *View* magazine. William Barrett who published *What Is Existentialism* the following year attended the Carnegie Hall lecture. He recalled that the hall was jam-packed and that "Sartre was wonderful with his oratorical brio. Of course he was also preceded by the reputation that the press had created for him." Barrett in Annie Cohen-Solal, *Jean-Paul Sartre: A Life* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 275–76.

[86] See George Cotkin, "New York Intellectuals and French Existentialists," in *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 105–133.

own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time of his connection to others."[87]

Newman's ideas concerning place, space, and time—in sum, the experiential—were also shaped by a visit he and Annalee made in the late summer of 1949 to the Ohio Indian mounds. Annalee recalled how excited he was to experience the mounds, and indeed, he sent a postcard to Smith exclaiming, "We have just come from seeing the serpent mound—Talk about art for the wild and in the wild—it is overwhelming."[88] Smith would have understood, for he too had visited the mounds.[89] It was a revelatory experience for Newman, and he soon began work on an essay that he titled "Prologue for a New Aesthetic." Although he never finished the essay, his notes reveal how his experience at the mounds was crucial in informing his ideas concerning place, as well as concerning space and the sensation of time—concepts that became integral to his artistic practice.

Of the almost ten thousand remaining mounds scattered throughout Ohio at that time, Newman explored the Miamisburg Mound, in addition to the Marietta, Newark, and Fort Ancient earthworks. In Miamisburg he would have seen one of the largest conical burial mounds in the eastern United States. The mound is sixty-five feet high and its base area covers about one and a half acres. Newman would have climbed 117 steps to reach its summit, where he would have been offered a panoramic view of Miamisburg and the valley of the Great Miami River. In Marietta he would have climbed another large conical mound, this one with forty-five steps to its top with a scenic view of the town of Marietta and the farmlands stretching out beyond (fig. 4.5). Newman described these vistas as "picture postcards" from which "one is looking out as if inside a picture rather than outside contemplating any specific nature."[90] The experience led him to consider the

[87] Newman, "Interview with Sylvester," 1965, *SWI*, 258.
[88] Newman to Tony Smith, September 7, 1949, the Tony Smith Estate archives (hereafter cited as TSEA).
[89] Anthony Smith statement in Francine du Plessix and Cleve Gray, "Who Was Jackson Pollock?," *Art in America* 55, no. 3 (May-June 1967): 52.
[90] Newman, "Ohio, 1949," *SWI*, 175.

difference between one's perceptual experience of pictorial space and that of a physical encounter with actual space, which was vastly more important to him. His experience of the Fort Ancient earthworks, which consist of eighteen thousand feet of earthen walls within a hundred-acre complex, contributed to his apprehension of this distinction, as did the Great Circle earthworks in Newark, Ohio, with its ring of earthen walls twelve hundred feet in diameter and ranging in height from eight to fourteen feet. "The feeling is," Newman wrote, "that here is the space; that these simple low mud walls [in contrast to the dramatic view seen from atop one of the mounds] make the space."[91]

For Newman, the Ohio earthworks were wholly experiential. As he explained in his notes, the mounds could not be gathered and put on view in a museum, nor could they be photographed and reproduced. Instead, they had to be "experienced there on the spot."[92] But perhaps more importantly, Newman felt that the most powerful effect of the mounds was the realization that what he was experiencing was not the sensation of space, but rather the sensation of time. He concluded, "The concern with space bores me. I insist on my experiences of sensations in time—not the *sense* of time but the physical *sensation* of time."[93] Temporality or duration is another aspect that Newman intuitively brought to his paintings. As Richard Serra notes, Newman's paintings are experienced both physically and visually as the viewer walks in front of the painting, traversing its length while inspecting its surface and materiality, observing nuances in color, or examining the edges of the zip. This is an experience, Serra notes, "that unfolds in time," adding "Newman differentiates between the sense of time, that is the passage of time and the sensation of time, which is a physical experience of a given context."[94] There is, of course, a temporal dimension to Minimalist art, which Michael Fried took issue with

[91] Ibid., 174.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 175
[94] Richard Serra, *Richard Serra: Weight and Measure* (London: Tate Publishing, 1993), 23.

when he described its viewing experience as one of "time passing . . . simultaneously approaching and receding."[95]

Newman's concept of place, its basis in time, and the experiential potential of art parallels a well-known anecdote told by Smith that occurred not long after Newman's visit to the Ohio mounds:

> When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get onto the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first, I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art. The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.[96]

Smith's description of the nighttime ride is one of an experiential movement through

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[95] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12–23. Reprinted in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 167.
[96] Tony Smith in Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* 5, no. 4 (December 1966): 18–19; quoted in *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, United Kingdom: 1992; 1996), 742.

space and time, an experience that involved a specific place and was inextricably bound up with an unfolding, changing, moving sensation of time.

Newman's Synagogue

In 1950, a year after their visit to the Ohio Indian mounds, Newman and Annalee traveled to Newport, Rhode Island, where they spent time surveying the local architecture. Newman shared his impressions with Smith, writing to him about the houses they saw in nearby Davidson as well as Newport itself. "Davidson," he wrote, "has a few terrific houses, and Newport is full of them—I don't mean the pile of mansions—400 colonial structures still standing."[97] He also discussed New England church architecture marveling, "It's amazing how these Americans can get a church front to fly off the ground with such simple means. They are all so light. I feel none of the weight of the Wall St. Temple," referencing a synagogue near his Front Street studio.[98] Newman's letter included thumbnail sketches to illustrate what he had seen. While impressed by church façades and residential architecture, he was most taken by the Touro Synagogue, the oldest synagogue building in the United States, which he described to Smith as "a true work of art."[99] The building, although not modern, displays simplicity in its symmetry, balance, and ordered rhythm. "The synagogue is terrific," he wrote Smith. "The outside is a box. The inside is the essence of an open, living space, the true theatre in the round—where everyone feels himself in it."[100] Newman's response to the Touro Synagogue echoes what he had experienced at the Ohio Indian mounds, and also anticipates his own design for a synagogue, in which the idea of creating a space in which one could authentically feel oneself would become the overarching principle.

Following his second show at Parsons in April 1951, Newman felt let down by friends (with the exception of Smith and Pollock) and withdrew from the art world. While he had earned respect for his writing, his paintings, when they received any

[97] Newman in letter to Tony Smith, September 5, 1950, copy at the BNFA.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

attention at all, either prompted bewilderment or were lampooned. That summer he removed his artwork from the gallery and "closed up shop."[101] He produced half a dozen paintings within the year, including his monumental *Cathedra*, equal in size to *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*. It was also at some point in 1951—perhaps simultaneous to Ossorio initiating talks with Pollock and Smith for a proposed church project in the late summer or early fall—that Newman began to devote his attention to designing a modern synagogue.[102] He produced nine pages of notes that mainly expressed conceptual notions, although he occasionally addressed more specifically structural ideas, titling one sheet "Architecture."[103] He also sketched out a number of architectural models on paper. They reveal how Newman shifted the ideas he had formulated about his paintings and began to apply them to three-dimensional, architectural form.

Newman's motivation for designing a synagogue did not stem from any religious impulse. He was not observant of the Jewish faith, did not attend services even for the High Holidays, and did not consider himself a religious man.[104] In the nine pages of notes that he produced in 1951, he jotted down a fairly well known joke that appears to express his feelings about the matter:

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[101] According to Hess, Newman's first two shows at Parsons were met with "silence and contempt." Hess, *Newman,* 1969, 55.

[102] In fact, the author discovered and identified a drawing by Tony Smith in the Barnett Newman Foundation files that is of his church. Smith's drawing also includes a sketch by Newman of what appears to be his synagogue design. It is intriguing to think of the two artists exchanging ideas about church and synagogue architecture while simultaneously developing their related projects.

[103] File labeled "1951 Synagogue," BNFA.

[104] Annalee Newman in note dated December 6, 1990, "Synagogue File," BNFA. In another note at the BNFA written by Newman in relation to the Stations of the Cross he states: "To be a religious person means that I am practicing some other man's religion, if that is it, then I am not. If by religious you mean I have a concern with my relations to other and I am concerned by the relations others have to me, I am religious." "Stations of the Cross File," BNFA. Armin Zweite, who gives the fullest account of the synagogue project (although not a completely accurate one), finds it unusual that Newman would be interested in synagogue architecture given the fact that the artist was virtually an anarchist all his life. Armin Zweite, *Barnett Newman: Paintings, Sculptures, Works on Paper* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 1999), 242. For an alternative view, see Mark Godfrey, "Barnett Newman's 'Stations of the Cross,'" in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, 46–66.

> There is the American joke about a Jewish Robinson Crusoe who had been stranded on an island who is finally rescued. Before leaving the island he asks the rescuing ship's captain if he should show him the city he built. He then showed him the City Hall he built, the synagogue he built, the library, a hotel, a concert hall, and another synagogue. "Two synagogues," the captain asked, "why did you need two synagogues?" "Is there one?" the Jewish Crusoe answered. "I don't go."[105]

Newman had long been interested in synagogue architecture. He was not only impressed with the Touro Synagogue, but also appreciated the architecture of a number of synagogues in downtown New York such as the Wall Street Temple, which he included in his occasional walking tours of Lower Manhattan. He also admired a synagogue on Walker Street, which had a front façade that resembled a Le Corbusier design.[106] His admiration for synagogue architecture encompassed both old and new structures, and he looked to them both as he clarified his own ideas for a modern design.

Historically, synagogues were built in the prevailing architectural style of their time and place. In the postwar period, synagogue architecture underwent a radical transformation. Similar to Maurice Lavanoux's and Otto Spaeth's efforts to modernize church architecture, rabbis and their congregations were looking for architecture that would better reflect modern Jewish experience. The Moorish mosque, which for centuries had provided a common model for a synagogue, came to be seen as both foreign and anachronistic. Newman addressed this question in his notes: "It is good that the Jew in America has gotten out of Alhambra and the mosque. But what is he in now?"[107] Newman wanted to come up with a solution.

The early 1950s witnessed a wave of new synagogues construction, many in the New York suburbs. The influential gallery owner Samuel Kootz contributed to the

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[105] Newman, unpublished notes, "1951 Synagogue," BNFA.
[106] Murray, conversation with author, September 8, 2008.
[107] Newman, unpublished notes, "1951 Synagogue," BNFA.

interest in modern synagogue architecture by inviting architects to propose their designs, which he exhibited in October 1951. He also paired the architects with artists who, in response to the architecture would provide large-scale abstract art. Newman likely visited the exhibition and it may have been what finally pushed him to work on his own synagogue design. He certainly knew a number of its participating architects and artists, his good friend Percival Goodman among them. Following Kootz's exhibition, the B'nai Israel congregation in Millburn, New Jersey, hired Goodman to design their synagogue, which they consecrated in 1952. It included a sculpture by Herbert Ferber, a wall painting by Robert Motherwell, and a curtain design by Adolph Gottlieb. Newman went to New Jersey to see what in the way of innovative synagogue design was being built there, and Goodman's recent construction was most likely among his stops, considering that he was a friend with both Goodman and Gottlieb.[108] Goodman, in fact, soon became one of the leading architects of modern American synagogues. By the early 1960s he had over fifty synagogues to his credit. Approximately one thousand new synagogues were consecrated in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.[109] These included Frank Lloyd Wright's Beth Sholom Synagogue, a glass pyramid located in suburban Philadelphia, begun in 1953. Newman did not need to visit these synagogues; they received wide coverage in art and architecture magazines as well as in newspaper articles.[110]

According to Hess, Newman found much of the contemporary synagogue architecture being built "appalling." Annalee later recalled that her husband felt that contemporary synagogues "looked too much like prisons."[111] Newman himself said that

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[108] See Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 110.
[109] See Janay Jadine Wong, "Synagogue Art of the 1950s, A New Context for Abstraction," *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 37–43.
[110] See Dore Ashton, "Reverend Comments," *Art Digest* 26, no. 4 (October 15, 1951): 15; James Fitzsimmons, "Artists Put Faith in New New Ecclesiastical Art," *Art Digest* 26, no. 4 (October 15, 1951): 23; Emily Genauer, "Art and Artists: Church Abstractions," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 7, 1951; Lionel Reiss, "Art for the Synagogue," *Reconstructionist*, 17 (October 19, 1951): 27–29; Percival Goodman and Paul Goodman, "Modern Artist as Synagogue Builder," *Commentary*, 7 (January 1949): 51.
[111] Notes from Heidi Colsman Freyberger's conversation with Annalee Newman, December 6, 1990, BNFA.

he felt that architects "were just putting chrome on delicatessens," implying that they were all surface and no substance; meaningless, or perhaps designed to impress.[112] He elaborated upon this in his 1951 notes: "[The American Jew] has substituted one kind of sentimentality, the sentimentality of glass and chrome, for the arabesque."[113]

Newman loved a challenge, which may be why, in 1963, he accepted Richard Meier's offer to concretize his idea for a synagogue and present it in an exhibition Meier was organizing for the Jewish Museum on American synagogue architecture.[114] Or perhaps it was because, as he later wrote in a statement for the catalogue, a synagogue offers the architect "the perfect subject because it gives him total freedom for a personal work of art."[115] Whatever the case, with his model for a synagogue, Newman conceived architecture as analogous with painting, as he had already approached painting as a form analogous with architecture. A statement from his 1951 notes explicitly describes synagogue architecture as sharing the telos of painting, indeed of any work of art: "The sense of place, the evocation of the exalted is not only the nature of the synagogue, it is the purpose of a work of art and it would seem that the synagogue as architecture would be the fundamental subject for architecture as art."[116]

"Recent American Synagogue Architecture," held at the Jewish Museum in the late fall of 1963, presented drawings, photographs, and models of seventeen synagogues designed by leading American architects including Goodman, Marcel Breuer, Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, Eric Mendelsohn, and Frank Lloyd Wright. All of the architects

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[112] Unsigned, "Where Jews Worship," *Newsweek* (November 4, 1963): 92.
[113] Newman, unpublished notes, "1951 Synagogue," BNFA.
[114] There are conflicting accounts as to how Newman became involved in the Jewish Museum's "Recent American Synagogue Architecture" exhibition. Richard Meier recalls telling Newman about the show over dinner one night, at which point Newman responded: "Oh, I've designed a synagogue," which led Meier to ask the artist to participate. See "Richard Meier and Frank Stella: A Conversation Between Architect and Artist," ed. Peter Slatin, in *Richard Meier, Frank Stella: Arte e Architettura* (Rome: Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1993), 229. Annalee Newman remembered that her husband had met Percival Goodman on a street corner, and that their conversation led to Newman's inclusion in the show. See notes from Heidi Colsman Freyberger's conversation with Annalee Newman, December 6, 1990, BNFA.
[115] Newman, "Recent American Synagogue Architecture," 1963, *SWI*, 181.
[116] Newman, unpublished notes, "1951 Synagogue," BNFA.

showed designs conceived of in the preceding ten years, with the exception of Newman, who had begun work on his synagogue in 1951. Armin Zweite writes "To everyone's astonishment, Barnett Newman participated in this exhibition with a Model for a Synagogue."[117] But those who knew Newman would not have been surprised, for they were well aware of his interest in architecture and may even have known of the designs he had begun working on twelve years earlier. Newman did not treat the invitation casually, but devoted all of 1963 to working on the synagogue, completing only one small painting, the twenty-four-inch-square *The Station.* Meier recalled that Newman took the proposal quite seriously, was extremely focused, and that "[his model] had an incredible simplicity and an absolute correctness in terms of where things were, of how they were positioned in creating an interior organization . . .. It was a great proposal and Barney just did it, and did it beautifully."[118] Newman was proud of the model that he produced and even had the portrait photographer Ugo Mulas photograph him next to it two years later. He could not, however, have realized its design without the help of Tony Smith.

The model's structural simplicity suggests something along the lines that Smith would have designed, but it also recalls Newman's description of the Touro Synagogue, whose exterior he had described as "a box."[119] Its form is straightforward, which is consistent with the drawings he made in 1951 in which he was concerned primarily with shape (fig. 4.6) The model is basically a large rectangular box that measures 31 ½ inches long by 22 ½ inches wide by 19 ½ inches high and rests upon a rectangular platform. Its most prominent feature is a set of zigzagging Plexiglas windows inserted into the longitudinal side walls where they become accordion-shaped above a base of solid plane. The front and back walls are solid. At either end is an entrance hall or lobby. The entire model is made of white foam core. In its stark simplicity and monumentality, the front of

[117] Zweite, *Newman*, 236.
[118] Meier in "Richard Meier and Frank Stella: A Conversation," 229.
[119] For the most extensive description and discussion of Newman's model and its accompanying drawings, see Zweite, *Newman*, 236–253.

Newman's synagogue resembles the Rothko Chapel, originally designed by Philip Johnson but completed by Eugene Aubry in 1971.

Newman was more concerned with the synagogue's interior dynamics than its exterior appearance, yet the interior of the model is only somewhat more detailed (fig. 4.7). As Zweite notes, Newman "followed a minimalist principle which not a single one of the architects participating in the exhibition observed in his own design."[120] Here Newman employed concepts that were entirely original. He placed the seating for the men—which, using baseball terminology, he called the "dugouts"—on the longitudinal sides of the building, directly below the cantilevered base of the tall windows. The women were to sit in "bleachers" sited on one of the short sides, opposite a rectangular box that that held the Ark of the Covenant, where the Torah is kept. That the women were not separated from the men by a compartment is consistent with modern synagogue architecture; by the late 1950s it was becoming increasingly common to dispense with the women's gallery as congregations responded to changing modern norms. At the center of the three wings of seating is the bimah, which Newman referred to as the mound, the elevated platform where the Torah is read. Traditionally, the central position of the bimah was not unusual. According to Percival Goodman, this positioning "was perhaps the only distinctively Jewish contribution to the history of architecture."[121] A centrally positioned bimah also aligns with Smith's centralized altar in his Church Project.

While Newman's analogies to baseball may sound odd, they are not out of character. Newman was a baseball fan, specifically of the New York Yankees, and he enjoyed twisting and reversing lines of high and low culture ("He'd run it backwards," as Robert Murray put it).[122] In the 1950s and 60s, baseball stadiums were often used for religious conventions, including Yankee Stadium, which beginning in 1950 regularly hosted conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses that often attracted more people in a single day than any other stadium event.

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[120] Zweite, *Newman*, 239.
[121] Goodman, "Statement," in *Recent American Synagogue Architecture* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1963), 21.
[122] Murray, conversation with author, September 8, 2008.

Newman conflated the baseball analogy with his recollection of the interior of Touro Synagogue and terms from the Kabbalah. Much has been made of his allusions to Jewish mysticism, which has been dealt with elsewhere.[123] Of more importance is the fact that Newman's primary motivation in designing the synagogue was to express in three-dimensional form one of the overarching themes of his paintings—the creation of a sense of place, a sense of identity, a sense of self-awareness. Newman's ideas concerning place, location, and site crystallized with his experience of the Ohio Indian mounds, but they were present in his reaction to the Touro Synagogue as well, which he had described as "true theater in the round—where everyone feels himself in it."[124] Newman again referred to the theater when writing in the catalogue of the Jewish Museum exhibition, but in a way that shows how his concept of "true theater" was antithetical to traditional ideas of the theater:

> In the Amsterdam synagogue tradition, men were put on a stage to become actors and the women were put behind silk curtains. . . . Here in this synagogue, each man sits, private and secluded in the dugouts, waiting to be called, not to ascend a stage but to go up on the mound, where, under the tension of that "Tzim-Tzum" that created light and the world, he can experience a total sense of his own personality before the Torah and His Name.[125]

At first, Meier did not expect Newman to contribute anything to the exhibition other than a statement on synagogue architecture, which Meier wanted to include in the catalogue. Soon it was decided that he would illustrate his text with drawings.[126]

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[123] See Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 114–115; and Zweite, *Newman*, 236–253.
[124] Newman in letter to Tony Smith, September 5, 1950, copy at the BNFA.
[125] Newman, "Statement in *Recent American Synagogue Architecture*," 1963, *SWI*, 181.
[126] This account of the genesis of Newman's synagogue design is based on Robert Murray's recollections as told to me in a meeting (September 2008) and email correspondence (August 2008).

Newman eventually made over fifty drawings and sketches of his synagogue design, many of them on Schrafft's napkins, where he often had breakfast.[127] Newman also called on Smith and Hans Noe, an architectural draftsman who served as Smith's assistant on the design and construction of the Olsens' houses, to help him execute more formal architectural drawings.[128] Newman was pleased enough with one of Noe's drawings to include it in the exhibition catalogue along with two of his own renderings. He did, however, have a problem with some of Smith's drawings, which he felt were more concerned with the functional aspects of the building as well as its exterior, to which he was indifferent.[129] Noe's drawings represent several aspects of what Newman achieved in the final model, although Smith's drawings appear to have been lost. However, the synagogue retained many of Smith's original contributions. Hess writes that the synagogue's windows stemmed partially from a zigzagging wall that Newman had designed to allow more paintings to be shown within a limited amount of space and that he told Tony Smith about this wall in the early 1950s.[130] However, the reverse is actually the case. As Murray confirmed, it was Smith who designed accordion-shaped walls for an early exhibition at Parsons, and it was with this precedent in mind that Newman devised the synagogue's most prominent feature, its zigzagging walls of windows on either side of the building.[131] Newman later based one of his sculptures, *Zim*

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[127] This approach differed from the one Newman took in making his paintings, which he insisted were unplanned.

[128] I thank Amy Newman who is currently at work on Barnett Newman's biography for informing me that it was Hans Noe who helped execute some of the synagogue drawings.

[129] Murray, email message to author, November 17, 2008. Interestingly, the exterior of Newman's synagogue recalls the Rothko Chapel in Houston, which was largely designed by the Rothko, but also included the hand of Philip Johnson who participated in the Jewish Museum's "Recent American Synagogue Architecture" exhibition.

[130] According to Hess, Newman's "new way to show paintings in architecture . . . involved a wall zigzagging at ninety-degree angles, the elements alternately window and masonry. Thus a painting would hang on a solid section of the wall; at right angles to it would be a floor-to-ceiling window." Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 110. It's difficult to believe that anyone would consider hanging a painting or work on paper in direct sunlight, Newman included.

[131] "When I folded a sheet of typing paper into a bellows-like form and used it to hold up a piece of two-by-four, Barney recalled that Tony Smith had designed a series of folded panels for an installation at Betty Parson's gallery. Not as a structural wall, but to increase the exhibition area,

Zum (1969), on the zigzag configuration.

Smith was also responsible for the second major aspect of Newman's synagogue design, that of the height and proportion of the grandstand and bleachers, which acted as seating in the synagogue. According to Hess, when Newman was in the process of designing the synagogue model, rather than buy "simple architectural textbooks" to determine the best height for the riser of a step, he and Murray measured the height of the steps below the grand arched entrance to the Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory on Lexington Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street in New York.[132] The Armory was designed by architects Hunt & Hunt in 1904–06 and was one of the first to employ a classically inspired design rather than the medieval fortress prototype, and so was considered to be a modern design. It was also home to the legendary 1913 Armory Show. Smith had introduced Newman to these steps in the late 1940s because he admired their proportion. In fact, these steps occasionally came up in their correspondence. In 1950 Newman wrote to Smith about an inn where he and Annalee had stayed that had an "exact copy, in cement, of the stairway you showed me in front of the 69 Regiment Armory." He asks, "Is it an Egyptian or really an Irish sense of geometry?"[133] Newman was alluding to Smith's cultural heritage as well as the fact that the Sixty-ninth Regiment was primarily Irish during the first half of the twentieth century. A few years later, while in Nuremberg, Smith sent Newman a drawing of a house he had just designed in which the Twenty-sixth Street Armory steps "have a certain relationship to the whole form."[134] For some reason, the risers were meaningful to Newman, too, who, like Smith, seized upon the idea of making them integral to the synagogue's design concept by basing the dimensions of the bleachers and grandstand on their height and proportion.

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which also separated one painting from another. This was typical of the discussions we had as work on the model progressed and Barney saw his idea assume tangible form." Murray, email message to author, November 18, 2008. In 1959, Smith also designed chevron-shaped partitions for French and Company, New York, as a way to exhibit more large-sized paintings.

[132] Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 110.

[133] Newman in letter to Tony Smith, September 5, 1950, copy at the BNFA.

[134] Smith in letter to Barnett Newman, August 24, 1954, BNFA.

The final element that Newman incorporated in the model from Smith was his conception of the separation of the floor, wall, and ceiling—and that the ceiling should seem to float. Newman liked this idea, according to Murray, and in his synagogue designed the architectural components to be individual entities, although structurally united. The zigzag windows act as transparent walls, and the ceiling, if one can assume that the model was built at a scale of one to fifty, would have soared at least eighty feet. The notion of creating a sense of levity and grand interiority is something that Newman and Smith had discussed in 1961 at Schrafft's, where Smith sketched out on a napkin a new design for Parsons's gallery in which he planned to achieve a similar spatial effect anticipating Newman's many studies on Schrafft's napkins in 1963.

Newman knew that his synagogue would never be built, and he took complete liberty in its design, ignoring the customary as well as utilitarian aspects that the other architects who participated in the exhibition—who were practicing professionals—had to address.[135] Nor did he have to factor in cost, materials, or even structural feasibility. As Zweite notes, basing his calculations on the model, each of the zigzag windows would have been fifty-nine feet high and ten feet wide. As frameless windowpanes, this would have been structurally precarious, if not impossible. But Newman's synagogue was wholly conceptual. In fact, he never even intended to exhibit his model. Instead, it was built to serve as a model from which to make drawings to include in the exhibition, which is why it ended up being the largest architectural model in the show. But Murray, who worked closely with Newman on the synagogue project, recalled that once it was

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[135] There were, however, posthumous attempts to erect a synagogue based on Newman's model. The first occurred in 1971 when Walter Nathan, an art collector from Chicago who had seen Newman's model at the 1971 *Barnett Newman Retrospective* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, contacted Annalee to ask for photographs of Newman's designs so that they could be incorporated into the interior design of Temple Jeremiah's inner sanctuary, located in Chicago. Temple Jeremiah has since undergone a number of redesigns and no one in the congregation could remember if any had been based on Newman's ideas for a synagogue. See "Letter from Walter Nathan to Virginia Allen, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 29, 1971," BNFA. In
December 1995 Nurit Sirkis from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, wrote to Annalee that she had secured the land and building permit to construct a synagogue based on Newman's scheme. At some point, the plans fell through.

completed "It suddenly looked like a tangible building, not an idea anymore."[136] They rushed to install it in the show, making Newman the first, and only, painter of his generation to exhibit a work as an architect.

Architecture to Sculpture: *Zim Zum I*

Newman's model for a synagogue did not result in any architectural commissions, but it did lead to *Zim Zum I,* of 1969, the last of seven sculptures that he produced during his lifetime. *Zim Zum I* is a two-part sculpture executed in Cor-Ten steel whose zigzag form derives directly from the ninety-degree-angled windows of Newman's synagogue (fig. 4.8). The sculpture's two separate pieces each measure eight feet tall and fifteen feet long.[137] Each element consists of six identical rectangles welded together at alternating ninety-degree angles to result in an accordion-like shape. The two elements face one another to produce a thirty-seven-inch-wide passageway through which the viewer walks. In preliminary drawings Newman indicated the viewer's path with wavy lines around and through the corridor. He originally placed the two elements so their zigzagging facets ran parallel to one another, as he had done with the synagogue's zigzagging windows, but he later changed their configuration so that the two elements were staggered and the pairs of facets were acutely angled to one another. Because the rectangular elements zigzag at right angles, an opening forms at one end like a door that beckons the spectator to enter into the accordion-shaped corridor. Further, with the elements staggered viewers are forced to change directions as they walk through the alternately widening and narrowing spaces. This creates a more acute spatial experience as one's sense of proximity and

[136] Murray, conversation with author, September 8, 2008. Murray made drawings of the model that were included in the exhibition, which were more like mechanical drawings with elevations, as if they were blueprints of what could become a built structure. These drawing were mounted on panels, which were affixed to the museum gallery's walls.

[137] Newman originally planned a twelve feet tall by twenty-two and a half feet long sculpture, but a work of these dimensions would not have fit into the shipping container in which it was to travel to the Hakone Open-Air Museum in Japan who had commissioned the piece. In 1984–85, Annalee permitted Gagosian Gallery to make a twelve-foot high version of the sculpture, as her husband had intended. It is titled *Zim Zum II* and was purchased by the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

distance to the steel alternates while traveling through the corridor of zigzagging elements. Viewers also become more consciously aware of their bodies as they pass within the expanding and contracting space, between the elements that approach and then recede from one's physical being. This kinesthetic experience is more pronounced with *Zim Zum I* than with the experience Newman had earlier achieved in some of his paintings, including *Vir Heroicus Sublimis,* or with any of his other sculptural works. It was an effect that he consciously sought and one that aligns *Zim Zum I* with Smith's sculpture of the early 1960s, as well as much Minimalist art from that period.

Newman had made his first three-dimensional work in 1950, just prior to his second show at Parsons and not long after his visit to Ohio. This first sculpture, *Here I*, consists of two approximately eight-foot-tall narrow vertical shafts that Newman fabricated out of white plaster and mounted upon shapes that unmistakably resemble mounds. The verticality of the plaster-covered two-by-four and its slimmer partner suggests two upright humans standing upon individual mounds, so that in form, title, and sentiment ("Here I am, *here*. . . . Here you get a sense of your own presence"), *Here I* clearly refers to Newman's experience in Ohio and reflects his desire to convey in three dimensions what he also sought to achieve in two, that is, to provide the onlooker with a sense of place, and therefore of self-consciousness. While Newman explicitly stated that he did not consider his sculpture to be a three-dimensional equivalent of his paintings, scholars generally agree that the sculpture's vertical shaft alludes to the "zip" within his paintings, a shape he repeated in his following three sculptures, *Here I (To Marcia)*, *Here II* (1965), and *Here III* (1965–66).[138] In 1967 he cast *Broken Obelisk* (1963/67), whose pyramidal base is related to his triangular paintings *Jericho* and *Chartres* (both 1968–69), although in this instance the sculpture informs the painting, rather than the other way around.[139]

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[138] See Hess, *Newman*, (1971), 75; Zweite, *Newman,* 215; Gabriele Schor, "Newman's 'Here' Series," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, 148–160; and Nan Rosenthal, "The Sculpture of Barnett Newman," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman*, 115–131.

[139] Newman dates *Broken Obelisk* 1963/67 on the grounds that he had the idea for it in 1963, but did not have the technical means to execute it until 1966.

Unlike these earlier works, *Zim Zum*, with its accordion shape, does not bear a formal resemblance to any of Newman's paintings; it descends directly from his architectural work as well as ideas he exchanged with Smith.[140] The zigzag configuration first appeared in Newman's 1951 drawings of his plan for a synagogue. In these early sketches, Newman appears more concerned with the synagogue's shape than with practicalities such as seating, the placement of the Ark, or the location of the bimah. It is as if even at this inchoate stage, he was thinking in terms of sculpture**.** The zigzag shape, inspired by Smith's gallery wall, obviously appealed to Newman; it seems to have suggested an air chamber to him, like bellows that contract and expand as air is forced through. His title *Zim Zum* (occasionally written as "Tsim Tsum" or "Tzim Tzum" in his notes) is a Kabbalistic term that denotes God's creation of matter by squeezing or contracting himself to make room for his creation.[141] According to Hess, Newman derived *Zim Zum*'s proportions from an accordion-fold announcement card printed on the occasion of his 1959 exhibition at Knoedler.[142] This method of folding thick paper or board to envision a sculpture's shape and scale is one that Smith had been using at least since the early 1950s.[143] In the late 1950s Smith's students at Bennington College occasionally helped fashion prototypes of his sculpture from folded paper. He later enlisted his daughters—Kiki, Seton, and Bebe—to help him fold paper and cardboard into maquettes. Once Smith had the means, materials, and skill available to him, he had

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[140] Its only relation to Newman's paintings consists in the fact, perhaps, that its panels have a proportion, which is roughly 2.6:1. Nan Rosenthal points out that these proportions are almost identical to the proportions of an important group of paintings he made in 1951–52, including *Ulysses* as well as paintings of the late 1960s such as *White Fire IV*. See Rosenthal, "The Sculpture of Barnett Newman," 128.

[141] Newman also considered *The Self* and *The Squeeze* as titles. See Zweite, *Newman*, 310.

[142] See illustration of accordion-fold announcement card in Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 124.

[143] In an interview with Renee Sabatello Neu, Smith told her how he had begun making cardboard boxes while in Germany in the early 1950s. Notably, Smith referred to his sculptures as "presences," which is the inverse of how Newman thought of his work. "At some point or other I started to replace them with steel. I didn't think of them as boxes, I just thought of them as being there which is how the word presence came into existence. I didn't think of them as presences in any melodramatic sense but rather simply I used that word simply in they context of saying that they were there, that they were present." Tony Smith, unedited transcript of a taped interview with Renee Sabatello Neu, July 31, 1968, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Archives.

these prototypes enlarged and fabricated out of steel, as Newman did with *Zim Zum I* in 1969.

Although it has become increasingly more common for artists to work with a wide range of materials, in the 1950s and early 60s not many painters ventured into sculpture. Nan Rosenthal notes that aside from Gottlieb, who made some constructions late in life, and Willem de Kooning, who in 1969 took a break from painting to produce some figurative bronzes (but only under pressure from a friend who had recently purchased a foundry), Newman was the only abstract expressionist painter to make sculpture.[144] According to Annalee, in 1950 her husband had become "suddenly obsessed" with the idea of making a sculpture.[145] But was it sudden or was it Smith's influence, who had been playing with sculptural ideas since he was a child and was also obsessed with three-dimensional form? Smith's most successful architectural achievements from the late 1940s and 50s are in fact quite sculptural. These includes Fritz Bultman's angular studio, Theodoros Stamos's hexagonal home, the cube Smith employed for Fred Olsen Jr.'s residence, and the trapezoids that make up two of Olsen Sr.'s residential pavilions. Smith had been preoccupied with form as mass and void for some time, and he and Newman, who often shared ideas about art and architecture, may also have discussed sculptural form.

In scale, simplicity, and spareness of means, Newman's *Zim Zum I* bears a similarity to a number of sculptural works that Smith was producing in the early 1960s. *Zim Zum* is a modular work, geometric in form, executed in Cor-Ten steel, which rests directly on the floor, not on a pedestal. It has no single vantage point, but offers multiple perspectives. It is static, and as a walk-through sculpture, it invites, in fact depends on, viewer participation. Yet it is also a sculpture that derives from architecture, which may be its greatest affinity to Smith's pieces such as *Free Ride* (1962), a partial cube that measures six feet eight inches, which he based on the average height of an entrance or

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[144] Nan Rosenthal, "The Sculpture of Barnett Newman," 115.
[145] Newman also confirmed that he had an "obsessive desire" to make *Here I*. Newman, "Interview with Andrew Hudson," *SWI*, 273.

doorway. The eight-foot-square by two-foot-deep paired wall-like constructions that make up *The Elevens Are Up* (1963) bear the closest likeness to *Zim Zum* and its paired elements in that here, too, the viewer is expected to transverse their length. Scott Burton described the experience of looking at and walking through *The Elevens Are Up* as "terrifying, like Mycenean tomb architecture."[146] Newman's *Zim Zum*, while perhaps not effecting a terrifying experience, has also been likened to architecture, not surprisingly since it was based on an architectural idea. For Richard Serra, master of terrifying corridors, this is *Zim Zum*'s failure: "*Zim Zum* might be an interesting architectural idea, but as sculpture it does not resonate. . . . The two folding screens do not collect the space on the outside, and on the inside, they create a one-dimensional path with a beginning and an end, like a corridor."[147] But for Newman, architecture, the body, and movement were the defining terms of *Zim Zum*, affinities that the sculpture shared with many of Smith's pieces. It evokes the movement of procession, which is what he also achieved with his only series of paintings *The Stations of the Cross* (1958–66).[148]

The Stations of the Cross

In 1953, still smarting from the dismal reviews that his first two exhibitions at Parsons had received, Newman remained somewhat isolated from the art world while simultaneously curtailing his studio production. He bought back *Untitled (No. 1)* from Ossorio because he didn't think it fared well next to the larger canvases of his cohorts, refused to attend Rothko's 1955 show at Sidney Janis, and did not exhibit between 1951 and 1955 with the exception of two small group shows at Parsons in 1952.[149] Between 1954 and 1955, he made just over a half dozen paintings, including the magisterial *Uriel*,

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[146] Scott Burton, "Old Master at the New Frontier," *Art News*, no. 65 (December 1966): 52-55.
[147] Serra interviewed by Serota and Sylvester in *Weight and Measure*, 23.
[148] Yve-Alain Bois also includes the four works Newman entitled *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* (1966-1970) as a series, but these four canvases are thematic rather than serial since each is of varying dimensions. Nor did Newman intend for them to be kept as a group, which he insisted upon with the fourteen *Stations.* See Yve-Alain Bois, "On Two Paintings by Barnett Newman," *October*108 (Spring 2004): 4.
[149] See Lawrence, "New Information," 473-477.

but did not complete any work in 1956 or 1957. Instead, he diverted a great deal of his attention toward a contentious lawsuit he filed against Ad Reinhardt, who he unsuccessfully sued for libel over an article Reinhardt had written for the College Art Association's *Art Journal.* These were also years of financial hardship, and Newman occupied himself with ways in which he could earn a living, including betting at the racetrack, where he tried to come up with a winning system. In late 1957 he suffered a near fatal heart attack. But in February 1958, Newman began to work in earnest again, stretching the first two of what would ultimately become a series of fourteen paintings that he titled *The Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabachthani*.

Newman worked on the series for eight years, completing two paintings every other year and finishing the last five paintings in 1965 and 1966. He knew from the beginning that he had embarked upon a series, but it wasn't until he was working on the fourth canvas (in 1960) that he began to think of them as Stations of the Cross.[150] He did not consider these paintings illustrative of the Passion, nor did he think of them as a series of anecdotes, but rather a record of his experience of making the paintings, which he regarded as a single event.[151] It could be argued that the paintings may represent his own passion, a passion for painting. When he started on the first canvases after three years of no studio production, he began them "privately, almost secretly." As Newman explained in unpublished notes, he approached them as a test "to see if I could paint at all . . . I hadn't done anything since 1955."[152] He later recounted in a public interview, "I

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[150] Newman, "The Fourteen Stations of the Cross, 1958-1966," 1966, *SWI*, 189. In his unpublished notes Newman states "It was right after doing the first two in 58 that I knew I would be doing a number of them as a series. But it was only after the fourth one that I realized that what I was saying (in terms of integrity) had a Passion, a singleness, a continuity that made me realize that I was being driven to do the Passion that there was the metaphoric representation of my ideas of the Passion. It came as sudden revelation." Newman, "Stations of the Cross," undated, unpublished notes, BNFA.

[151] Mark Godfrey argues that the Stations evoke the question posed to them by the memory of the Holocaust: "Why did you forsake me?" He also states that the Stations evoke the crucifixion, which, in the postwar period, came to serve as a metaphor for the suffering of the Jews and other groups under Nazism. Mark Godfrey, "Newman's 'Stations of the Cross," in *Reconsidering Barnett Newman,* 53–54.

[152] Newman, "Stations of the Cross," undated, unpublished notes, BNFA.

tried to make the title a metaphor that describes my feeling when I did the paintings. It's not literal, but a cue. In my work, each Station was a meaningful stage in my own—the artist's life. It's an expression of how I worked."[153]

Ann Temkin believes that Newman's decision to approach the paintings as a series may have been, in part, a response to the Claude Monet exhibition "Seasons and Moments," held at MoMA in the spring of 1960. As is well known, Monet, later in life, would settle on a subject that he proceeded to paint in series, such as the façade of the Rouen Cathedral or stacks of grain adjacent to his Giverny home. According to Temkin, Newman "venerated Monet" and "rejoiced" in MoMA's acquisition of its first Monet painting in 1953, which is why, she suggests, working in series would have appealed to him. But Monet's serial paintings investigate changes in light, weather, and seasons, thus they are thought of as narrative or analytical studies, which Newman's Stations decidedly are not.[154] He does, however, mention Monet in his notes on the Stations: "When I began the fifth [painting] . . . I realized I could not do just any number of them in a series like Monet's haystacks (a theme, not variations), but that I would have to do fourteen Stations. . . . Each would be a single total work, but only the complete fourteen could say what I have to say." While Newman's series comprises fourteen individual paintings, he conceived of them as a whole; he wanted their visual impact to be "total, immediate, at once," an impact that he strove for in the individual paintings as well. In his unpublished notes on the Stations, he recalled that one of the challenges in making them "was to see if I could get the entire painting to be seen at once as a single totality without 'reading' or putting parts together."[155]

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[153] Newman, quoted in "Unanswerable Question," *Newsweek* (May 9, 1966): 100. Reprinted in "From *Barnett Newman: The Stations of the Cross, Lema Sabachthani*," *SWI*, 190.

[154] Yve-Alain Bois cites the following note that Newman "jotted down," but he does not give a citation: "Serial painting is a story, a narrative sequence, without a subject and without any events— as much a story as any illustration, but illustrating only itself. A narrative structure that is mute and because it is mute it is an ornamental art not much different than basket-weaving." Newman in Bois, "On Two Paintings by Barnett Newman," 4.

[155] Newman, "Stations of the Cross," undated, unpublished notes, BNFA.

Newman's contemporaries are a more likely starting point than Monet for the fourteen Stations. It was during these years that Mark Rothko commenced his ensemble of paintings for the Four Seasons restaurant in Mies van der Rohe's Seagrams Building, a fact that Newman most likely was aware of. It was also the first time that Rothko worked to develop a series of related paintings to be viewed as an ensemble. A more likely source, perhaps even an unconscious one, is Tony Smith, who in 1953 had shown Newman his idea for a church dependent upon a group of fourteen canvases. Smith described his church to Newman as "a building [in] which as a work of art, paintings would play an integral part." He specifically stated that the paintings were to be "fourteen abstract paintings, symbolic in number and position of the Stations of the Cross . . . of the same size and the work of one man."[156] Given his close friendship with Smith, and the fact that Smith had also referenced the Stations of the Cross in describing his church project, it is clear that Smith's idea must have played a decisive role in initiating the only systematic ensemble of paintings within Newman's oeuvre.[157]

Anarchist that he was, Newman proudly claimed that his paintings were neither a commission nor was their efficacy dependent upon a church setting.[158] In any case, by the time he completed the fourteenth and final painting of the series in 1966, it was clear that Smith's project for a church that called for fourteen paintings would never be realized. In 1961, as the result of a near fatal car accident, Smith had developed a debilitating blood disease that made it impossible for him to continue practicing architecture.[159] But Newman's paintings were soon installed, in 1966, in a cathedral-like setting—Frank Lloyd Wright's recently completed Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. While Newman—unlike Rothko, who by the early 1960s had completed cycles of paintings for the Four Seasons as well as Harvard's Holyoke Center—did not conceive of

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[156] Smith in letter to Barnett Newman, July 5, 1953, BNFA.
[157] See Tony Smith, "Project for a Roman Catholic Church in an 'Ideal' American Landscape," July 4, 1953, TSEA.
[158] See Newman's "The 14 Stations of the Cross, 1958–1966," *Artnews,* 65, no. 3 (May 1966): 26–28, 57.
[159] Smith's last built architectural project was a studio for Betty Parsons in Southold, New York, which he initiated in 1960 and completed in 1962.

the Stations with an architectural destination in mind, by the time he had completed half he knew the Guggenheim would exhibit them.

The Guggenheim's exhibition of Newman's fourteen *Stations of the Cross* did not take place along the museum's spiraling ramp, instead they were hung within the Grand Gallery (now called the High Gallery), a space that Wright originally intended to showcase the best works within the Guggenheim's collection, but which functions like a side chapel within a great cathedral of art.[160] The gallery is basically an addendum to the museum's primary exhibition space, which consists of seventy-four niche-like bays along the outer edge of the museum's central spiral. In contrast, the High Gallery is located at the base of the ramp. Wright's spiral path carves into the room, cutting off half of its implied rectangular space. One enters the gallery by ascending four broad and low stairs while passing under a high-arched entranceway. It is a voluminous space where the walls stretch twenty-three feet high, lending the alcove a cathedral-like quality. The setting is stark, as Smith had intended for his own church—all white with diffuse light streaming in from above. The paintings provided the only color. All it lacked was pews, an altar, and Smith's papier-mâché version of Grünewald's *Crucifixion*. Newman's last Stations are contemporary with Rothko's paintings later installed in the Houston chapel. Like the Rothkos in Houston, the installation of Newman's Stations in the Guggenheim created a simultaneously ambulatory and contemplative experience, a walking meditation.[161]

The Guggenheim exhibition had originally been envisaged by curator Lawrence Alloway as a retrospective of Newman's work. Plans for a survey evaporated, but the

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[160] Hilla Rebay often referred to the museum as a "consecrated temple" for non-objective painting. See Jack Quinan, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: A Historian's Report," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* 52, no. 4 (December 1993): 14.

[161] *Be II* (1961, 1964) was also in the Guggenheim exhibition, which Newman and Alloway hung to the right of the High Gallery. Newman did not conceive of *Be II* as part of the original series of *The Stations of the Cross*. He added it to the series with the Guggenheim exhibition, and the painting has been included among them ever since. It was originally titled *Resurrection* and renamed *Be II* in 1966. According to James Lawrence, Newman was ambivalent as to whether the painting should serve as a coda to the series, but later accepted it as so once that interpretation had arisen at the Guggenheim exhibition. Lawrence, "Abdication in an Artistic Democracy," 263–64.

fourteen Stations were shown. Newman's retrospective would come, but it would be a posthumous one, held at the Museum of Modern Art in October 1971, just over a year after his death. William Lieberman oversaw its organization and direction, and he hired Tony Smith to help with its installation. The show was planned during Newman's lifetime, and initially the Stations were not part of the exhibition. However, after his death the museum allocated additional space, which allowed for the inclusion of the Stations (in addition to some of his last pictures).[162] Smith designed a separate room for the Stations, placing the paintings against white walls within a chapel-like space. As simple as the quarry shed about which he had written to Newman sixteen years earlier, the room resembled the baptistery for another of Smith's church projects, his proposed Church of the Way of the Cross (1954). One entered the room off of MoMA's garden. Smith placed four paintings on each of the three unbroken walls with a painting to the left and right of the entranceway. In the center, rather than a baptismal font, he erected a wall on which he hung *Be II*, the painting that Newman completed in 1966, which secured its place as coda to the series. With his installation of Newman's Stations, Smith was finally able to realize his plan of presenting within one room fourteen abstract paintings all by one artist, all of the same size, and symbolic in number and position.

While Smith's original church design called for 8-by-10-foot paintings, Newman's Stations measure 6 ½ by 5 feet each. Following his heart attack in 1957,

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[162] Correspondence between Thomas Hess, Wilder Green, and William Lieberman reveal that Smith's selection to do the installation had been secured in June 1970, a month before Newman's death, who obviously approved, if not enthusiastically suggested that Smith oversee the exhibition's design. Hess acted as director of the show. See letter from Thomas B. Hess to Wilder Green, Director of Exhibition Program, Museum of Modern Art, December 17, 1970, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Archives. A week earlier, Green had expressed some concern over the size of the show. He wrote to Hess that the museum had originally planned for seventy-four works, but the checklist now included eighty-four: "We calculate there would be 436 running feet of canvas all told—and this does not include the 20 drawings, some prints, and six sculptures that you plan to show as well." In contrast, he noted that the "Pollock exhibition [which had taken place three years earlier] (which filled both the Garden Wing and the entire East Wing) contained 82 paintings, with far fewer large paintings that you envision for Newman." See letter from Green to Hess, December 10, 1970, MoMA Archives. In the end, the show included seventy-five paintings, six sculptures, drawings, prints, and photographic panels of Newman's Model for a Synagogue.

Newman (temporarily) worked on smaller and, presumably, more manageably sized canvases.[163] Newman had never worked with these dimensions before, but he pointedly explained that in the Stations the "'problem' of scale" was well met by the smaller size because he "wanted human scale for the human cry. Human size for the human scale."[164] Each canvas is taller than the average man, yet their width is within the span of his arms. Their human scale and human size allow the viewer to relate to them even more intimately than do his larger paintings. Because they are part of a set or ensemble meant to be viewed together and never to be dispersed, they invite a processional viewing—one after another. Even their title implies a journey, although Newman insisted that they were not illustrative of events on the Via Dolorosa. As Mark Godfrey notes, in the Guggenheim installation viewers would have had to experience the first four paintings from fairly close up, given that looking at the them from a distance would have put viewers in the pathway of other museum visitors going up the ramp.[165] But Newman would not have been displeased with this; the short distance with its attendant all-encompassing effect was something that Newman sought to achieve from early on.

As Jack Quinan notes, architectural forms can be broadly divided into those that invite contemplation—such as the pyramids, the interior of the Pantheon, and Greek temples—and those that invite participation—such as the façades of baroque churches or the naves of Gothic cathedrals.[166] The Guggenheim Museum falls into the latter category. The visitor is inescapably swept up into the spiral's ascending movement. It is an ambulatory museum and there is no choice but to participate in its movement. Although in 1966 all fourteen Stations were initially installed in the Guggenheim's High Gallery, Newman reportedly found the experience too intense, and the first four Stations were rehung outside and to the left of the High Gallery, with two paintings within each of two

[163] Somewhat similarly, Agnes Martin, whose seventy-two by seventy-two inch canvases became her trademark size, scaled down to sixty by sixty inches in 1993, when she turned eighty years of age.
[164] Newman, "The 14 Stations of the Cross," 57.
[165] Godfrey, "Newman's 'Stations of the Cross," *Reconsidering Newman,* 53-54.
[166] Quinan, "Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum," 475.

bays. Had all fourteen been installed along the museum's ramp, the perpendicular walls separating the individual bays would have interrupted a processional viewing of the series. It would have been a stop-start viewing experience. Yet in the revised installation, Newman and Alloway achieved a more fluid viewing experience that not only retained the element of procession, but also made it more spacious.

Space-Domes

Newman claimed that talk of space bored him, yet it remains one of the central features of his work as well as an early concern. In 1949, after visiting the Ohio mounds, he complained, "There is so much talk about space that one might think it is the subject matter of art."[167] He proceeded to describe the type of space that he found so uninteresting, that of "depicted" space, the type of space one typically finds in painting. He ranted against Renaissance, impressionist, cubist, shallow, negative and positive, trompe l'oeil, and Mondrian's space. What he championed was a more experiential sense of space that takes place outside the painting's pictorial plane.

In a 1962 interview, Newman told Dorothy Seckler, "Since childhood I have always been aware of space as a space-dome." This image of space stayed with him for nearly fifty years. Newman went on to describe his paintings to Seckler as creating a "space-dome" where "you are involved as an actual, physical thing in space." He meant this quite literally. He continued, "Anyone standing in front of my paintings must feel the vertical domelike vaults encompass him to awaken an awareness of his being alive in the sensation of complete space."[168] Newman was speaking of a very literal sensation of space. Richard Shiff provides a description of what Newman meant in relation to his paintings when he answers his own question, "How does the 'space-dome' appear then, materialized as a painting?"[169] As Shiff explains, even the horizontal paintings, such as

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[167] Newman, "Ohio, 1949," *SWI*, 175.
[168] Newman in "Frontiers of Space: Interview with Dorothy Seckler," *Art in America*, 50, no. 2 (Summer 1962), reprinted in *SWI*, 251.
[169] Shiff, "To Create Oneself," in *Barnett Newman: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 89 (hereafter cited as *BNCR*).

Vir Heroicus Sublimis are an impressive eight feet high, yet they still are within human scale. Standing in front of one of Newman's canvases, the viewer apprehends the verticality of the zips however narrow or wide, while the wide swathes of color arc over in a trajectory that envelops the viewer's body—or so Newman believed. As he told Seckler, "I suppose I'm the only painter painting convex pictures."[170]

Newman preferred a sense of wide-open space, like that of the Ohio mounds rather than an enclosed and confined one, but his notion of a space-dome undoubtedly has its roots in architectural experience. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when or where Newman first encountered this sensation of domed space, but if we take him at his word, it occurred sometime between 1910 and 1915, and most likely within the five boroughs of New York since he did not venture beyond the city until he was an adult. Newman grew up in the Tremont section of the Bronx and both his home on Belmont Avenue as well as the grade school he attended, P.S. 44, were within walking distance of the New York Botanical Garden, whose Palm Court, which opened in 1902, features a ninety-foot dome. Newman's interest in the botanical is well known and it would not be surprising if he visited the Botanical Garden and its Palm Court. But even if he never went inside the garden, it would be difficult to ignore the massive, gleaming, glass dome that rose above the neighborhood of low-lying homes. According to Annalee, Newman loved New York. "This," she said, "was his city." He was always very knowledgeable about the neighborhoods in which he lived, paying special attention to their landmarks. In an unpublished essay from 1943 he wrote, "The world knows New York by its new landmarks."[171] The Bronx Botanical Garden's Palm Court would certainly have been one of them.

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[170] From the typed transcript of his interview with Seckler, but subsequently edited out by the artist—presumably. Newman, "Interview by Dorothy Gees Seckler, 1962," typed transcript, BNFA. Indeed, Robert Murray recalled seeing *Vir Heroicus Sublimus* at Ben Heller's New York apartment and how the painting enveloped him even when he had his back to it. Murray, conversation with author, September 8, 2008.

[171] Newman was born on New York's Lower East Side and lived his entire life within the five boroughs of the city. According to Annalee, Newman loved New York, "this was his city." He was knowledgeable about the neighborhoods within which he lived, paying special attention to its

Newman's initial boyhood fascination with domes and space would have had ample opportunity for reinforcement. Domes, of course, are prevalent in religious architecture, which we know interested Newman. There is the dome of Rome's Pantheon and Bernini's dome over Sant'Andrea al Qurinale, also in Rome, important enough precursors that Newman would not have to leave the city to know or see images of them. Given his later interest in synagogue architecture, Newman likely was aware of the immense dome Eric Mendelsohn placed over the main sanctuary of his Park Synagogue in Cleveland (1953), which appears to engulf its congregants. Goodman used a dome in his Temple Beth Sholom in Miami Beach (1956). And closer to home, Pietro Belluschi constructed a sixty-five-foot-tall domed sanctuary for Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester (1962).

Another architect who was very interested in the form was Buckminster Fuller, whose architectural domes were widely publicized and indeed often built during the 1950s and 60s. Although Fuller was not the original inventor, he investigated the possibilities of a sphere-shaped system for enclosing space and named the dome "geodesic" from field experiments with Kenneth Snelson and others at Black Mountain College in the late 1940s. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was quite a push to popularize the geodesic dome. The entrepreneur Henry Kaiser deluged the mass media with images of the domes along with step-by-step instructions for their erection. Geodesic domes could be seen in television commercials, newsreels, newspapers, magazine articles; they were used in industry, entertainment, and by the military. In 1955 the *New York Times* announced on their front page that the Brooklyn Dodgers were considering covering their stadium with a Fuller dome big enough to encompass a thirty-story building. Four years later the *Times* announced that over one thousand Fuller domes had been erected in the past half-dozen years. Closer to home, in 1959, just a few years before Newman's interview with Seckler, Arthur Drexler, curator and director of MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, installed one of Fuller's geodesic

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landmarks. In an unpublished essay he wrote in 1943, he claimed "The world knows New York by its new landmarks." See "New York, 1943–44," *SWI*, 30–31.

domes in the museum's garden (in the company of bronze figures by Gaston Lachaise and Aristide Maillol). At an impressive fifty-five feet in diameter and forty-five feet high, it occupied a large portion of the garden's space and would also have been visible from the street. It was just a year earlier, in 1958, that Newman wrote Frederick Kiesler requesting that he send him drawings of his planned Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem that was to house the Dead Sea Scrolls and was, essentially, one huge dome. In 1964, a geodesic-domed pavilion was erected at the World's Fair in Queens, New York, where crowds had the opportunity to see Fuller's design in the flesh.

Although Newman's thinking of space as a space-dome reflected his interest in architecture, he also thought of the space-dome in more natural, or even celestial, terms. In the same interview with Seckler, he equated the domelike vaults created by his paintings with the sky above. In 1959 Newman had traveled to Saskatchewan, Canada, to lead a summer workshop. There he had the opportunity to visit the Canadian prairie, which was perhaps as momentous for him as the Ohio Indian mounds had been ten years earlier. Newman wrote to one of his collectors about the experience. He talked about the prairie's openness and that he felt "surrounded by four horizons, a circle of 360 degrees and a dome [the sky's] of 180 degrees."[172] He was disappointed that he could not visit the tundra, which was a thousand miles further north, where he expected to experience a similar space-dome effect. He did, however, later title a painting he had done in 1950 "Tundra." Newman imagined the wide-open space of the tundra, the prairie, and the Ohio mounds as engendering a sense of oneself, a self-awareness, which generates a sense of place. For Newman, these were interrelated concepts that he felt were essential to the efficacy of his work

Newman may not have made it to the tundra, but he returned to Canada, to exhibit in a space-dome. In 1967 curator Alan Solomon invited Newman to exhibit a painting in the US Pavilion at the International and Universal Exposition—or Expo 67, as it was

[172] Newman in "Draft of Letter to Alan P. Power," September 4, 1959, BNFA. Quoted in Shiff "To Create Oneself," *BNCR*, 88.

commonly known—to be held in Montreal that year.[173] The exhibition, titled "American Painting Now," took place in a Fuller-designed dome, which became a centerpiece of the fair (fig. 4.9). Newman participated by shipping his *Voice of Fire,* an almost eighteen-foot-high by eight-foot-wide canvas, which because it is such a towering work, Shiff describes as an "obvious exemplar of his "space-dome."[174] There is some dispute as to whether or not Newman made the painting expressly for Expo 67 or if he had already completed the canvas before he was asked to participate.[175] Working in acrylic, Newman placed twin vertical strips of ultramarine blue astride a middle bar of cadmium red. Medium-sized in width, the blue bands divided by a comparably wide band of red stretch up toward the heavens. It is difficult to call these bands zips, which connote speed and slimness; compared to pencil-thin columns within *Vir Heroicus*—whose dimensions are the same as *Voice of Fire*, but oriented horizontally rather than vertically—these bands plow, but with steadfastness.

Newman knew that the exhibition would take place within one of Fuller's geodesic domes. The structure was a hexahedron fabricated of steel tubing. It measured 200 feet high and 250 feet in diameter, as high as a twenty-storey building and more than four times the size of the dome MoMA had exhibited in their garden. It was actually a three-quarter dome since it rested upon a reinforced concrete foundation fixed to a rock base. It was composed of hexagonal components and a transparent outer shell of tinted acrylic panels that covered the structure as a whole. The dome's exterior was much more imposing than its interior, where the exhibition platforms appeared to float in the air, conveying a weightlessness. Newman approved of showing his work in the Fuller dome and may have thought that *Voice of Fire* would stand out strongly in Fuller's spherical

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[173] With over fifty million visitors and sixty-two participating nations, some consider Expo 67 to be the twentieth century's most successful World's Fair.
[174] Shiff, "To Create Oneself," *BNCR*, 89.
[175] According to John O'Brian, Newman made the work specifically for the exhibition. Brydon Smith, however, argues that he had finished the canvas before he was asked to participate in Expo 67. See John O'Brian in "Who's Afraid of Barnett Newman?" In *Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power*, *and the State*, eds. Bruce Barber, Serge Guilbaut, and John O'Brian (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 128.

space, especially compared to the work of the other artists who were showing with him. They included Jasper Johns, who made a collage titled *Map* based on Fuller's Dymaxion Projection of the World.

Although it might have seemed a perfect opportunity to see a Newman within an actual space-dome, the actual experience was somewhat less than perfect. Similar to the installation of Pollock's *Blue Poles* in a Smith-designed gallery for paintings, the combination of a Newman painting within a Fuller dome was not as successful as one might have expected (fig. 4.10). Firstly, Newman's *Voice of Fire* was in the company of twenty-three other huge paintings, all by well-known artists of the 1960s and commissioned for the pavilion by Solomon. These included James Rosenquist's thirty-three-by-seventeen-foot *Firepole*, Roy Lichtenstein's ten-by-thirty-foot *Big Modern Painting*, an illuminated work by Robert Rauschenberg, and Claes Oldenburg's ten-foot-high *Giant Soft Fan*—hardly a group that would establish a contemplative environment. Newman's painting hung suspended from the ceiling on stainless steel cables so that it floated within the dome against a background of sailcloth panels; however, visitors, unfortunately, were unable to stop and stand in front of the canvas, where they might spend some time and experience the effect that Newman intended. Instead, they were ferried through the dome on an escalator with no opportunity to stop within the exhibition. According to O'Brian, the organizers were not interested in having visitors appreciate the works as individual objects; rather, they wanted to create an "environmental gestalt."[176] Further, the organizers of the American Pavilion apparently had a different notion of what constituted an art exhibition than Newman did. In addition to Johns's *Map*, *Voice of Fire* hung alongside an Apollo space capsule, close-up photos of the moon, blow-ups of movie stars, and three red-white-and-blue parachutes.[177] In the

[176] O'Brian writes further that he is certain that Newman did not want his paintings to "function as incidental decoration in a technophiliac dream. But that is precisely how it did function." O'Brian, *Voices of Fire*, 127–128.

[177] The American Pavilion's theme was "Creative America", and the dome contained several hundred artifacts and works of art attesting to American achievements in art, architecture, and space technology.

end, the paintings hung within Fuller's dome like incidental banners because the interior space, while sympathetic, outweighed the canvases.[178] And what really stole the show was Fuller's dome, which was deemed "the most imposing structure on the fairgrounds."[179] A sentiment shared by all, although perhaps not by all gladly.

[178] Michael Ballantyne, the *Montreal Star'*s art critic, wrote that the paintings "hang inside Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome like heraldic banners of the space age." Similarly, the *New York Times*'s John Canaday reported that the paintings were like "enormous, bright banners." Ballantyne, *Expo 67* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1967), 54. Canaday, "Exorcism in Montreal," *New York Times*, April 30, 1967.

[179] David Jacobs, "An Expo Named Buckminster Fuller," *New York Times,* April 23, 1967. See also Unsigned, "U.S. Pavilion at Expo 67 Opens with Space and Art Display," *New York Times*, April 24, 1967.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mark Rothko: Architectonisized Paintings

Mark Rothko's classic paintings of the 1950s and 60s invite a host of readings. Critics write about them in poetic terms that include allusions to the transcendental, the sublime, the philosophical, the psychoanalytical, the romantic, the spiritual, the tragic, and even the deathly. Peter Selz's description of some of these works, written on the occasion of the artist's first major retrospective held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, is representative of criticism of that time: "Rothko's paintings of the fifties make us feel as if a charge has been set up; we seem to be confronted with the world during the heavy hours preceding the storm, when the clouds are about to close in on each other."[1] Dore Ashton, an art historian and close friend of Rothko's, compared his work to Greek drama, "to the fatalism, the stately cadence and the desperately controlled shrieks."[2] Or Diane Waldman, who for the artist's second major retrospective in 1978 wrote that his achievements "had attained a harmony, an equilibrium, a wholeness in the Jungian sense that enabled him to express universal truths in his breakthrough works, fusing the conscious with the unconscious, the finite and the infinite, the unequivocal, the sensuous and the spiritual."[3] In the catalogue for the National Gallery of Art's 1998 retrospective, Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty wrote about the tragedy and void in Rothko's dark paintings from the late 1950s and into the 1960s.[4] Rothko's darkened palette is often viewed through the lens of his biography and is thought to reflect the artist's increasingly dark spirit. Admittedly, the artist's interest in Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, the powerfully expressive music of Richard Wagner, and Rothko's fascination with ancient cultures have colored some of his statements about his work and have contributed to the

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[1] Peter Selz, *Mark Rothko* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), 12.
[2] Dore Ashton, "Mark Rothko," *Arts and Architecture* 74, no. 8 (August 1957): 8.
[3] Diane Waldman, *Mark Rothko, 1903–1970, A Retrospective* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1978), 69.
[4] Barbara Novak and Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko's Dark Paintings: Tragedy and Void," in *Mark Rothko* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 264–281.

metaphorical interpretations of his work, but Rothko also spoke of another possible lens through which to view his work.

Rothko's oft-quoted remark "The reason why I paint large pictures is precisely because I want to be very intimate and very human" was prompted by Philip Johnson at the 1951 symposium "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture," held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951 (where Rothko was one of the few artists to participate).[5] Within the decade Rothko would work with Johnson toward his ideal, which although less elaborated in writings and interviews, is related to Barnett Newman's ideas of creating a sense of place. Rothko would come to work closely with contemporary architects involved in modern design including Philip Johnson and Josep Lluís Sert. He was also a good friend of Frederick Kiesler, whose architecture and environmental installations were an important influence as he was designing the Rothko Chapel.

Rothko's desire to instantiate an intimate environment through painting reflects his interest in transforming the nature and experience of an existing architectural space with his paintings. Rothko would become the sole abstract expressionist to actually succeed in creating a specific cycle of paintings designed to inhabit a specific building over which he had artistic control. Although he planned murals for Johnson's Four Seasons restaurant in Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building in 1958 and for Harvard University's Holyoke Center in 1961, the Rothko Chapel in Houston (1964–67)—initially designed by Johnson but ultimately completed, for the most part, by the artist—represents a fully realized architectural project. Here Rothko's paintings take on the scale and tectonic opacity of the architectural plane to such a degree that the paintings do not so much eclipse the architecture as the central focus of the room as they become the architecture. Their size, scale, and surface engage the visitor in an active phenomenological viewing, which by definition involves a sense of self-awareness or a sense of being a sentient body in real time.

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[5] Mark Rothko quoted in "A Symposium on How to Combine Architecture, Painting and Sculpture," *Interiors + Industrial Design* 110, no. 10 (May 1951): 110–105. Ben Shahn was the only artist on the panel of architects. Johnson later admitted that the few participating audience members, such as Rothko and Amédée Ozenfant, had been "mostly planted stooges." See Johnson, "Symposium," *Interiors*, 101.

This chapter not only addresses the architectural nature of Rothko's paintings, but also the place of the body in relation to his work, which as Jeffrey Weiss has recently noted, has been addressed with surprising rarity.[6] We will see how the Houston chapel exemplifies the culmination of Rothko's project to create an integral whole of artistic and architectural motives, indeed how the chapel provides a context for all of Rothko's oeuvre, to the extent that it could be argued that any Rothko should be viewed as a fragment of a potential architecture.

Entering the Circle

Like Newman, Rothko had no formal education as a painter and was largely self-taught, with the exception of a short eight months when he took a class with Max Weber at the Art Students League in 1925–26. Rothko entered the circle of artists who would soon be known as the abstract expressionists in the early 1940s. He had met Adolph Gottlieb in 1929 at the Opportunity Gallery, a city-subsidized gallery that presented month-long shows of young artists selected by more established artists. Rothko first exhibited his work when Bernard Karfiol, an instructor at the ASL, selected a few of his paintings for exhibition at the Opportunity Gallery in 1928. It was also in the late 1920s that Rothko befriended Milton Avery who would greatly influence the younger artist's understanding of color. Gottlieb introduced Rothko to Barnett Newman in 1936, but it wasn't until 1943, when Rothko asked Newman to anonymously rewrite his and Gottlieb's well-known protest letter to the *New York Times*'s Edward Alden Jewell, that they became friends. Rothko had shown at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century and was certainly friendly with Jackson Pollock and Tony Smith, but more as a colleague than confidante. There are apparently no letters from Smith in the Rothko Family Archives and no Rothko correspondence in Smith's Archive other than an undated draft of a letter of recommendation in which Smith described Rothko as "one of the great

[6] Jeffrey Weiss, "Dis-Orientation: Rothko's Inverted Canvases," in *Seeing Rothko*, eds. Glenn Phillips and Thomas Crow (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2005), 156n17.

painters of the world."[7] Nor do Pollock and Rothko appear to have had any written communication. In the 1940s Rothko became close with Clyfford Still, who greatly influenced his thinking and, for a time, could be considered to have been a mentor.[8] Still would also make paintings of monumental size, yet he never expressed interest in architecture or in placing his work in specific architectural contexts.

After Still, Rothko's closest friend at the time was Newman, in whom he found a kindred spirit. They met at a wedding breakfast hosted by Gottlieb for Newman and Annalee, and their friendship solidified when Rothko gave Newman his *Syrian Bull* (1943) in gratitude for rewriting the letter to Jewell. A few years later, Newman produced his only portrait, an ink-on-paper sketch of Rothko done in 1949. Of all the artists of their generation, Newman and Rothko had the most in common. They were close in age; Rothko was born in 1903 and Newman just two years later. They were also similar in cultural background and aesthetic viewpoint. Although neither was religious, they were both sons of Jewish immigrant parents who struggled to assimilate into the American experience while maintaining their own cultural and religious heritage. They chose to pursue careers as artists rather than continue in the businesses that their fathers had

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[7] Tony Smith in an unaddressed and undated draft of a letter (probably early 1960s) in support of Rothko who was applying to Hunter College, New York, for a teaching position. Tony Smith Estate Archives (hereafter cited as TSEA). It is unlikely that Smith did not write to Rothko during his years in Germany or send him drawings of his ideas for "The Project for a Roman Catholic Church in an 'Ideal' American Landscape" (1953), since Rothko was one of the artists he hoped to include in the church's pictorial scheme. The letters did not find their way to the Rothko archives.

[8] Rothko's work became increasingly more abstract around 1946, at a time when, according to one of their students, Rothko and Still were "very tight and a tremendous stimulus to each another." A number of scholars attribute Rothko's shift into abstraction to Still's influence. Rothko himself acknowledged the effect of Still on his artistic development. See Ernest Briggs in James Breslin, *Mark Rothko, A Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 222; Katherine Kuh in Breslin, *Mark Rothko*, 225; Steven Policari, "The Intellectual Roots of Abstract Expressionism: Mark Rothko," *Arts Magazine* 54, no. 1 (September 1979): 124–134; and Waldman, *Rothko,* 51–52. Polcari feels that Rothko also acquired his antagonistic attitude toward the art world from Still, which included his reluctance to exhibit in group exhibitions, his decision in 1947 to no longer title his work, and his refusal to write about his art. Steven Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1991), 138.

started—Newman's as a menswear manufacturer and Rothko's as a pharmacist.[9] In the late 1940s, when Rothko moved from Brooklyn to midtown Manhattan, he became, like Newman, an uptown artist who lived a domestic, family-oriented life in contrast to the downtown "bohemians" who were more free-spirited. They were both intelligent and articulate with broad intellectual interests. Rothko sent Newman over a dozen letters between 1945 and 1950. In them he confessed his anxiety about teaching at the California School of Fine Arts over the summers of 1947 and 1949 and shared his thoughts about the painting and architecture he had seen during a five-month exploration of Europe in the late spring and summer of 1950, much as Smith and Newman's correspondence chronicled architectural sights they had visited during their travels.[10]

By the early 1950s Newman's feelings toward Rothko began to fray and he backed off from their friendship. In August 1952 Rothko wrote to his friend and fellow artist Herbert Ferber, "Barney has remained invisible."[11] Some speculate that Newman was angry at Rothko for not defending his work and not insisting upon his inclusion in the important "Fifteen Americans" show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1952, which included a number of friends and colleagues including William Baziotes, Ferber, Still, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and Pollock, in addition to Rothko, who both showed eight paintings and had a room of his own.[12] In April 1955 Newman wrote to Pollock about his

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[9] Both of Rothko's brothers, Moise and Albert, followed in their father's footsteps and became pharmacists.

[10] Rothko wrote to Newman at least fifteen times from San Francisco and over the summer of 1950 while he was traveling in Europe. Newman seems not to have kept up the pace of Rothko's letter writing. In August 1950, writing to Newman from London after spending almost five months in Europe, Rothko dolefully disclosed "we did miss the absence of word from you most of all." Mark Rothko to Barnett Newman, August 8, 1950, Barnett Newman Foundation Archives (hereafter cited as BNFA).

[11] Rothko in Miguel López-Remiro, *Mark Rothko: Writings on Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 81.

[12] An exhibition catalogue inscribed to Newman from Still reads: "To my friend Barnett Newman who, also, should have been represented in this exhibition." Reprinted in Melissa Ho, "Chronology," *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 325. According to Rothko's biographer, James Breslin, Still informed Newman that Rothko had "actively sought to 'keep him out of the show.'" Breslin, *Rothko*, 346. On December 18, 1953, Still criticized Newman and Rothko in a letter he wrote to Alfonso Ossorio. He told Ossorio that he didn't know whether to "withdraw totally" or to "spend another chunk of life slugging it out

problem with Rothko. He felt that Rothko, beginning in 1950, had plagiarized his work. He complained that Rothko had come to his studio the day before Newman's first show at Parsons and turned all his vertical paintings horizontally and then bullied him into showing two of his horizontal paintings vertically. "[Rothko] is an adapter and a user, not a producer, a creator," he wrote Pollock, pronouncing, "The time has come for me to dissociate myself from his work so that I and others can see it for what it is."[13] Thomas Hess later agreed that Rothko was an "adapter" and equated Rothko's horizontal bars with Newman's vertical zips, which he described as Newman's "vertical format placed on its side." Hess continued, "It is no coincidence, I believe, that Rothko's images quickly became larger and contained fewer and fewer forms after his exposure to Newman's paintings."[14] But Newman's anger and jealousy toward Rothko was misguided; indeed, an examination of Rothko's early work shows that he followed his own natural progression and arrived at a style of painting that was clearly distinct from

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with Newman, Reinhardt, and Rothko and show them up for the Bauhaus bullies they are. They have really put over a terrific fraud; Rothko even naming the time, five years, that it would take them to achieve their notoriety." Clyfford Still in letter to Alfonso Ossorio, December 18, 1953, Alfonso Ossorio Papers, Archives of American Art, quoted in Breslin, *Rothko*, 346–347. (hereafter cited as AAA).

[13] Barnett Newman in letter to Jackson Pollock, April 4, 1955, copy in BNFA.

[14] Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 90. Newman would not let up. In March 1959 he made perfectly clear that neither Rothko nor his wife, Mell, were welcome to attend the opening of his French and Company show: "This is to make certain that you know that you are both not welcome to my show." Barnett Newman in letter to Mark Rothko, March 1959, copy at BNFA. While Newman felt betrayed by Rothko, in November 1967, in the midst of a dispute with Robert Motherwell, which took place on the pages of *Art International* throughout the summer, fall, and winter of 1967-68, Newman wrote: "My relationship with Still and Rothko has always been on the highest professional level. Whatever our differences may have been over our paintings or concepts, our relationship has always been honorable. I have never had one harsh word with either Still or Rothko. Nor was there any quarrel. . . . Still and Rothko are both going their ways and I am going mine. . . . Motherwell never heard me issue one single word of calumny against either Still or Rothko, nor has anyone else." Barnett Newman, "Letter to the Editor (Reply to Robert Motherwell), 1967, reprinted in *Barnett Newman, Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; 1992), 229–230 (hereafter cited as *SWI*). Newman's archives reveal that he kept a file on Rothko that included reviews and articles on the artist that spanned the late 1950s through 1970. The artists died within six months of one another; Rothko in February 1970, and Newman the following July.

Newman's. That Rothko was interested in, and achieved, aims similar to what Newman also achieved cannot be reduced to a case of mere imitation.

From WPA Murals to Architectural Space

From 1936 to 1939 Rothko participated in the Works Progress Administration program. His initial assignment was with the Treasury Relief Art Project, where for a few brief months he witnessed the undertaking of large, mural-sized paintings. TRAP's mission was to "decorate" nearly two thousand government buildings, predominantly post offices, with murals. It was considered "The Ritz" of the federal arts projects because it was more concerned with the creation of high-quality murals than with simply putting money in the pockets of unemployed artists.[15] Although Rothko was an easel painter, TRAP hired him because they were having a difficult time finding skilled American muralists. Rothko only made one painting while working as a TRAP artist, but through his association with the program and its artists, he became aware of the possibilities of working on a large scale while gaining the knowledge as well as the confidence to enter federally funded mural competitions for art in public buildings. Rothko had already produced wall-sized paintings in the early 1930s with a set of mural panels he completed for the Berkshire Country Club in Wingdale, New York, which depicted golfers and sportsmen. Unfortunately, when the club was remodeled, Rothko's panels were lost. Yet there exist other works from this period that show Rothko understood how to approach wall-sized narrative painting that worked in concert with the architecture in which it was installed. In a 1938 study for an unrealized mural for the New Rochelle, New York, post office, Rothko chose the theme of transit and postal communication and illustrated a broad progression of pilgrims, covered wagons, and railroads traversing the wide-open country. Another study, *Untitled (Study for Social Security Building Mural)* (1940), reveals Rothko's exceptional awareness of and sensitivity to the spectator's spatial and physical relationship to a large work (fig. 5.1).[16]

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[15] See Breslin, *Rothko,* 119.
[16] See David Anfam, *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas, Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998; 1999), 24n64 (hereafter cited as *MRCR*).

Rothko made the work to submit to a competition for a mural illustrating the life of Benjamin Franklin, to be installed in the Social Security building in Washington, DC. The study, in oil on gesso board, is not large, measuring just eighteen by thirteen inches. Within it, Rothko made a wholly abstract "mural" with a few broad swipes of thinned-out oil. Interestingly, these bands of green, magenta, and brown anticipate his Multiforms of the late 1940s. But even more remarkable is the fact that Rothko paid far greater attention to the spectator than the subject of the proposed mural. Directly below and positioned centrally underneath the depiction of the mural, Rothko included a female viewer who looks straight up at the "mural." Rothko has drawn her hat, coat, and shoes in detail, which sets her into sharp focus against the abstraction. It is as if he was more concerned with how the mural would be viewed than with the mural itself. He would repeat this exercise almost twenty-five years later when he sketched a figure in Philip Johnson's architectural drawings for the Rothko Chapel indicating the viewer's line of sight in relation to the placement of his murals. The 1940 mural sketch is an early indication of Rothko's concern for the viewer's relationship to his paintings, which would prove to be a recurring and significant issue for him.

From Classical Models to the Spaces of Modern New York

Rothko had a lifelong interest in and commitment to the art of the past, which he believed could serve as a prototype for modern forms, given that both expressed inherent ideas common to all of human experience.[17] Like Newman, Rothko was also interested in iconic architecture, yet his admiration was directed less toward the American vernacular and more toward Greco-Roman antiquities including the Doric temples at Paestum and the wall decorations from the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii. Closer to home, he often visited the Boscoreale frescoes in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art to study these exceptional examples of Second Style Roman wall painting with their tromp l'oeil architectural details, which included rusticated masonry, pillars, and

[17] Stephen Polcari believes that Rothko subscribed to the notion of collective psychology wherein modern man shares the same basic psychological ideas with his predecessors as concerns their fears and motivations. Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, 118–121.

columns. Rothko also admired examples from Renaissance Italy such as Fra Angelico's frescos in the monastery of San Marco in Florence (1440–45); the Laurentian Library and its vestibule by Michelangelo, also in Florence, in the cloister of San Lorenzo (1523–68); and the refectory designed by Andrea Palladio on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice (1560–62). Although Rothko may well have been familiar with reproductions of these works, he would visit Florence in the summer of 1950, when he visited San Lorenzo and San Marco.

From early on, as evident in works dating as early as the 1930s, Rothko exhibited an interest in architectural forms and appeared fascinated with exaggerated depictions of architectural space, a fact that those who have studied his work in depth have not overlooked. For example, his 1936 oil *Interior* is best described as an architectonic fantasy; it depicts a façade with post-and-lintel construction, symmetrical columns, blank panels, and sculpture niches, in which Rothko placed elongated statuary. If there was a specific model for this classical façade, it is too vague to identify, yet David Anfam, author of the catalogue raisonné of Rothko's paintings, feels that it recalls the chapel and lobby (*ricetto*) of San Lorenzo in Florence, which Rothko may have seen in a reproduction.[18] *Interior* also approximates the façade of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library. *Through the Window* (1938/39) is another example that illustrates Rothko's preoccupation with architectural motifs. Its principal image is a standing woman looking out through a window, her hand on its ledge, her eye directed toward a floating figure on her right, yet Rothko focuses great attention on the repetition of planes created by windows within windows, their accompanying wall planes, and on the right side of the canvas, the flat surface of a blank easel. *Mother and Child* (c. 1940) offers an example of Rothko's fascination with interior space in a dramatic key.[19] Here the mother lurches forward and the daughter remains behind, her legs planted upon an impossibly tipped

[18] Anfam, *MRCR*, 45n169.

[19] As concerns the dating of Rothko's paintings, I follow the lead of the Rothko catalogue raisonné, which employs an oblique (/) when a date is uncertain; "c." when the date is more certain within the one year (c. 1940); and a dash ("1938–39"), which indicates that the work was completed over a period of successive years. See "Guide to the Catalogue Raisonné," *MRCR*, 6.

floor that forces the viewer's eye to zoom back into deep space. The ceiling presses down and the walls press inward like a compactor that threatens to flatten the figures.

Rothko was also drawn to public interiors. Urban scenes are not uncommon during the 1930s, although Rothko was more interested in depicting the confines of the underground subway than a city street. *Untitled (Waiting Room)* (1935) and *Subway* (1935) are good examples. In each painting a row of seated passengers waits on the platform, yet are nearly sucked into deep space as the floor tips up. The eye is drawn back toward the farthest point within the composition's perspectival space, gathering speed as lines of columns recede into the vaguely threatening gloom of the underground chambers. These weird spatial scenarios call to mind the unreal perspectives of Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical painting. Rothko would have been familiar with de Chirico's work from the Museum of Modern Art's 1936 groundbreaking exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism," which included seventeen of de Chirico's paintings and nine of his drawings. That year MoMA acquired *The Evil Genius of a King* (1914–15) and his haunting cityscape *The Nostalgia of the Infinite* (1913).[20]

Sometimes the space Rothko depicted is overwhelmingly claustrophobic, as in *Untitled (Musicians)* (1935), where five figures and their instruments, including two stand-up basses, are impossibly squeezed into too small a space to contain them. In *Women in a Hat Shop* (c. 1936) three massive matrons are nearly crushed by a ceiling that bears down on them, forcing the women to tip forward and teeter on the edge of the pictorial space, and nearly fall into our own. In *Untitled (Nude)* (1937/1938) a nude woman towers over the entire length of the canvas as she appears to walk back into a corner, her head turned as she looks over her shoulder, trapped in the diminishing space where the two walls meet.

In some instances, Rothko's interest in the viewer's relationship to architectural space is expressed through less confined structures. In a number of paintings from his Subway series, Rothko depicted isolated figures within architectural settings, which do

[20] Anfam notes that "Rothko's involvement with temporality would have especially attuned him to de Chirico's "metaphysical" equation between suspended time and unnerving spatial scenarios. Anfam, *MRCR*, 35.

not bear down on them. Nonetheless, the principal relationships between these figures, as Michael Compton notes, "is not person to person but person to architecture or space."[21] In *Underground Fantasy [Subway (Subterranean Fantasy)* (c. 1940) the figures are elongated to such a degree that they almost become part of the architecture, as if they were columns on the subway platform. And in sketchbook drawings of subway platforms, Rothko eliminated both figures and details of the locale to such a degree that he created an "abstract structure of empty rectangular planes [in which] the architectural dominates the human."[22]

Toward Abstraction

In the early 1940s Rothko began to base his work on myth and archaic motifs such as bird and animal forms, zigzags, and profiles of men from imagined legends that he compartmentalized into stratified registers. In the mid-1940s he turned to biomorphic and organic forms, yet even in many of these so-called "surrealist" works, the artist once again organized the shapes and forms into strata and divided the background into three horizontal bands that vary in tone and color. These tripartite backgrounds would momentarily disappear, only to reemerge in his paintings of the 1950s and 60s, although void of any suggestive or recognizable imagery. The biomorphic paintings of 1946 are often similarly divided, yet with them Rothko moved even closer to abstraction. By 1947–48 Rothko had largely rid his work of any recognizable imagery including literary references, symbols, organic forms, automatic writing, or calligraphy, so that all that remained were shapes defined by color. He also began to increase the size of his canvases. Although his palette was occasionally subdued at this time, the amorphous shapes were becoming increasingly brighter, and he began to use thin washes of oil so that the diffused forms appear to float across the canvas, and figure and ground meld and merge into total abstraction. As abstract as these works are, they are still the result of Rothko's preoccupation with architectural space, shape, and form.

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[21] Michael Compton, "Introduction," *Mark Rothko: The Seagram Mural Project* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1988), 8.
[22] Breslin, *Rothko*, 129.

Henri Matisse's *The Red Studio* (1911) hastened Rothko's progression into abstraction. The painting was on view at the Museum of Modern Art in the late 1940s, where he studied it for hours on end, as did a number of artists of his generation. Rothko later confirmed that this masterful work was of crucial importance to him.[23] He was undoubtedly drawn to the way that Matisse had created a sense of interior space with nothing more than vibrant walls of color; not a single architectural element is delineated, save for the indication of a window and an occasional line where the walls meet the floor. Matisse had collapsed pictorial space onto the two-dimensional surface of the canvas, yet had simultaneously realized the effect of a spacious interior. Matisse's shade of red would appear in a number of Rothko's paintings from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

When Rothko first showed his earliest abstract paintings at Betty Parsons Gallery, many viewers equated them with the ethereal and saw them as evoking clouds, mist, sunsets, dawn, rainbows, fire, or even the atmosphere on distance planets. In March of 1948 one reviewer described the new abstractions as "loose clouds of color [that] appear to float on the surface . . . this work, even when it masters structure, is incredibly fluffy."[24] The following April, for his third show at Parsons, he exhibited eleven paintings that would come to be known as Multiforms.[25] Parsons's checklist does not offer enough detail to reconstruct the show, but it is certain that Rothko exhibited *No. 9* (1947, CR 366), a small yet radiant canvas of pink, orange, and yellow offset by islands of black.[26] In Thomas Hess's review of the show he continued the cloud analogy but

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[23] Dore Ashton, *About Rothko* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 112–113. In 1954, long after he had ceased using titles, Rothko painted *Homage to Matisse* in recognition of his admiration for the artist.

[24] "Reviews and Previews: Mark Rothko," *Art News* 45 (April 1948): 63.

[25] According to Bonnie Clearwater, "The title 'Multiform' does not seem to have been used before Rothko's death. It appears for the first time in the catalogue for the Rothko exhibition at the 1970 Venice Biennale. It is thought by the staff of the Marlborough Gallery, who prepared this catalogue, that Rothko used the term 'Multiform' generically when referring to his transitional paintings of 1948–49." Bonnie Clearwater, correspondence with the Australian National Gallery, July 12, 1984, in Michael Lloyd & Michael Desmond, *European and American Paintings and Sculptures 1870–1970 in the Australian National Gallery* (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1992), 248. To avoid confusion, Rothko catalogue raisonné numbers will be given in this text for the artist's numbered paintings.

[26] Anfam, *MRCR*, 61.

added an element of weather. Rothko's paintings, he wrote, contain "flat, thin, colored areas that float like clouds or fall like heavy rain over large canvases."[27]

By 1949 the amorphous areas within Rothko's color-saturated paintings began to take on definitive form so that they appeared more like stacked and floating rectangles. These rectangles stretched across the breadth of the canvas. For his fourth show at Parsons, in January 1950, he exhibited sixteen paintings, all from 1949. With these new paintings he used a new technique. He sized the canvas with rabbit skin glue that he had mixed with powered pigment. He also began painting the tacking margins so that the canvas assumed a greater degree of three-dimensionality. Yet reviewers continued to describe his paintings in terms that suggested anything but solidity. Belle Krasne noted, "The artist's control of his latest canvases seems more dubious than a cook's control of a melted cheese sandwich. All solidity disintegrates under his brush."[28] Krasne had a point, for the glue-and-pigment mixture produced an even more radiant melding of color, which Rothko applied in wide swathes that shimmered across the width of the canvas.

By 1950, as the paintings became more colorful, the blurry and indistinctly edged rectangles had begun to coalesce into more solid bars of varying hues. He stacked them more evenly upon one another in a variety of configurations within a canvas that was generally taller than it was wide. Rothko showed a number of these works at Parsons in 1951, which Stuart Preston likened to "sections of a rainbow**."**[29] When Rothko showed recent works at Sidney Janis Gallery in 1955, Hess reprised the cloud analogy when he described the paintings as "cloud-edged rectangular fields of color [that] are piled symmetrically on a vertical axis inside the rectangle of the canvas."[30] And Dore Ashton, Rothko's longtime friend and supporter, who in her 1958 overview of the preceding ten years of Rothko's work, described his paintings from the early 1950s as canvases "composed of simple squared forms bearing magical films of color."[31]

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[27] T.[homas] B. H.[ess], "Reviews and Previews," *Art News* 48 (April 1949): 48–49.
[28] Belle Krasne, "Mark of Rothko," *Art Digest,* no. 24 (January 15, 1950): 17.
[29] Stuart Preston, "Chiefly Abstract," *New York Times*, April 8, 1951.
[30] T.[homas] B. H.[ess], "Reviews and Previews," *Art News* 54 (Summer 1955): 54.
[31] Dore Ashton, "Art: Lecture by Rothko," *New York Times*, October 31, 1958.

While Rothko was interested in achieving certain effects with his use of color, he did not like having his paintings likened to things that they were not. At one time he told his friend Herbert Ferber that if he saw something within his paintings that resembled an object, he would change its shape.[32] The one exception to this rigorous banishment of any verisimilitude might have been when Rothko referred to his work from the 1950s as "façades."[33] In 1947 he stopped using titles and began to number his paintings instead, in order to eliminate any suggestion of historical, descriptive, or literary associations. (Occasionally a painting's range of colors serves as its title, but this happened for practical reasons—it made accounting for them less confusing.) Rather than inciting a search for symbolic meanings, Rothko wanted the viewer to apprehend the work's subject matter strictly within its formal means—the painting's particular form, color, proportion, and shape.

Rothko, Greenberg, and the Decorative

By the mid to late 1950s Rothko's had begun to work in increasingly darker hues. The fiery yellows, oranges, and vermilions of the late 1940s and early 1950s simmered down into mustards, browns, and ferruginous reds. He also used black and navy more regularly, as well as mossy greens. Rothko toned down his palette in response to the fact that several people had referred to his paintings as decorative, or worse, said that they made for good "décor." In 1954 James Fitzsimmons, writing for *Arts & Architecture,* admired Rothko's abilities in his handling of the paint but ultimately judged that "His work is purely decorative. It tells us nothing about ourselves, the world we live in or the cosmos."[34] And without equating his paintings with clouds, Fitzsimmons still considered it fluff: "One expects such manifestations in fashionable cocktail lounges and sanitaria,

[32] Herbert Ferber in interview with Phyllis Tuchman, June 2, 1981, Archives of American Art (hereafter cited as AAA).
[33] In a 1958 lecture at Pratt Institute (in fact, his last public statement), Rothko acknowledged, "My pictures are indeed facades (as they have been called)." He was referring to Elaine de Kooning's catalogue forward to his exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, September 5–October 6, 1957. Rothko quoted in Breslin, *Rothko*, 282.
[34] James Fitzsimmons, "Art: Comments on New York Exhibitions," *Arts & Architecture* 71 (February 1954): 6.

not in galleries and concert halls."[35] Elaine de Kooning held a similar view, yet was a sophisticated enough viewer to recognize that "decorative" could not be further from Rothko's intentions. She told an interviewer, "I felt [Rothko's paintings] were very much involved with comfort and luxury and they looked very natural in Jeanne Reynal's luxurious house, and people looked very well against them. They made a wonderful graceful décor, all of which was anathema to Rothko."[36] De Kooning was right; under no circumstances did Rothko want his paintings to be construed as decorative. In fact, he once told an acquaintance that he despised the *Herald Tribune*'s Emily Genauer because she had described his paintings as "primarily decorations."[37] This to Rothko was the ultimate insult.

It did not help that in April 1950 *Vogue* featured one of his paintings in an article on home decorating. In a comparison, they illustrated the "many-picture-wall," which included Piranesi prints, copies of Michelangelo drawings, old English lithographs, and a white marble bust of Hermes presiding over the entire arrangement. On the facing page was a photograph of Rothko's 1949 Multiform *No. 8* (1948), an impressive seven-and-a-half-foot painting, which was hung majestically on a tall white wall, consuming nearly all the available space from floor to ceiling. A photo stylist added a simple white Parsons

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Elaine de Kooning in interview with Phyllis Tuchman, August 27, 1981, AAA. Reynal owned *No. 9/No. 24*, 1949, oil on canvas, 88 x 57 1/2" (CR 416), a tomato red painting with bands of white above and below a forest green mid-section. The painting is now in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC.

[37] Rothko in John Fischer "The Easy Chair: Mark Rothko, Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," 1970, reprinted in *Rothko, Writings on Art*, 132. Genauer's review of Rothko's 1961 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art was actually quite appreciative, and in defense of her critique as well as to indicate how sensitive Rothko was to charges that his work was decorative, a fuller portion of her text appears here: "Subject matter in Rothko's paintings has been abandoned, the catalogue points out. Now line and movement are also eliminated . . . texture is not important . . . few of the elements, which are a part of most paintings have remained. These are enormous pictures without subject, line or movement, which are mirrors of the viewer. If the viewer insists that he sees nothing in them, that, plainly, is an admission that he has nothing in him. Well, I DO see something in Rothko's pictures. I see endlessly changing variations on a single theme. I see huge surfaces divided horizontally. Once in a while the divisions are vertical, into bands of color that are sometimes stunningly decorative. . ." Emily Genauer, "Exhibit Holds Art Without Subject Line," *The New York Herald Tribune*, 18 January 1961. On Rothko's paintings as decorative, see also T.[homas] B. H.[ess, "Reviews and Previews," *Art News,* 43, no. 2 (April 1949): 48–49.

table to the picture, upon which was placed a glazed bowl that perfectly matched the yellow in Rothko's painting. The setting suggested a modern home of contemporary design especially when compared to the fussy, "artfully cluttered"—as *Vogue* described it—wall on the opposite page. It could not have pleased Rothko.[38]

Another critic who characterized Rothko's work as decorative was Clement Greenberg, who as one of the most vocal and prolific champions of abstract expressionist painting had surprisingly little more to say about the artist's work. Greenberg did not review any of Rothko's individual exhibitions—he had eight in New York between 1944 and 1955—and only occasionally mentioned him, usually as one within a group of other artists, in his essays on abstract expressionism with the exception of two: "'American-Type' Painting" (1955) and "After Abstract Expressionism" (1962). Even in these two essays, Greenberg inextricably linked his comments on Rothko to Newman and Still. The reason for this neglect, according to Irving Sandler—an eyewitness to many of the artistic arguments of the day—was because Greenberg did not consider Rothko a radical enough painter, especially compared to Newman, whose work he held in higher esteem because he thought it achieved greater flatness.[39] Greenberg did, however, appreciate Rothko's color (as he did Newman's), which he found "brilliant," describing him as an "original colorist."[40] However, Greenberg identified a suggestion of imagery in Rothko's paintings. Rather than clouds and rainbows or sunsets and dawn, he detected something more earthbound: "The three or four massive, horizontal strata of flat color that compose his typical picture allow the spectator to think of landscape."[41]

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[38] See "One-Picture Wall or Many-Picture Wall," *Vogue* (April 15, 1950): 66–67.
[39] Irving Sandler, *Mark Rothko* (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1983), p. 13n28. According to Herbert Ferber, at some time in the late 1940s or early 1950s, Rothko told Greenberg "do me a favor. Don't *ever* write about me." Ferber feels that this was in response to Greenberg publishing as much as he did on Pollock and David Smith, which he somehow felt was detrimental to his career. Ferber in Jeffrey Potter, *To a Violent Grave: An Oral Biography of Jackson Pollock* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1985), 182.
[40] Greenberg, "'American-Type' Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 232 (hereafter cited as *CEC*).
[41] Ibid.

But most problematic of all for Greenberg was that Rothko's color appeared so tonally monotonous, so flat, so soaked into the canvas and lacking in surface texture, and so simply spread over such large canvases that spectators, he thought, could not help but respond to the paintings as décor. Admittedly, in his discussion of color, Greenberg warned that Newman was also liable to being described as a "decorator," but in the final analysis, it was Rothko who took the hit.[42] According to Dore Ashton, Rothko may have darkened his palette for fear of being considered a "decorative" painter, as Greenberg had charged in "'American-Type' Painting." "It was as if," she said "[Rothko] were striking out with exasperation at the general misinterpretation of his earlier work—especially in the effusive yellow, orange and pinks of three years back." She concluded, "[Rothko} seems to be saying in these new foreboding works that he was never painting luxe, calme, volupté, if we had only known it."[43] Years later, Greenberg must have felt some remorse over his treatment of Rothko. In a 1973 essay on Matisse's influence on contemporary painting—an artist whom Greenberg had specifically associated with Rothko—he admitted, "Too much of the best art of our time was criticized, when first seen, for being too 'decorative.'"[44]

[42] Ibid., 233.
[43] Dore Ashton, "Art," *Arts and Architecture* 75 (April 1958): 8, 29, 32.
[44] Clement Greenberg, "Influences of Matisse," in *Henri Matisse* (New York: Acquavella Galleries, 1973); reprinted in *Art International* 16 (November 1973): 28. In "'American-Type' Painting," Greenberg wrote: "Of the three painters [Rothko, Newman, and Still] . . . Rothko is the only one who seems to relate to any part of French art since Impressionism, and his ability to insinuate contrasts of value and warmth into oppositions of pure color make me think of Matisse, who held on to value contrasts in something of the same way." "'American-Type' Painting," 1955, *CEC*, 232. As concerns Rothko and French painting, Bernice Rose has linked Rothko's use of abstract areas of color to Pierre Bonnard who she feels served as a stimulus for many of his paintings. See Bernice Rose, *Bonnard/Rothko, Color and Light* (New York: The Pace Gallery, 1997).

Materiality

They are not pictures.

—Mark Rothko, 1959[45]

Mentions of light, in addition to color, its companion, also appear frequently in much of the commentary on Rothko's work from the late 1940s into the mid-1950s. In 1987 Richard Humphreys, Head of Education at the Tate Gallery, scanned a substantial cross section of literature on Rothko and found that the words most commonly used to describe his late 1940s to early 1950s paintings include "light," "radiance," "luminosity," and "glow."[46] The color and light within Rothko's paintings were often associated with notions of the sublime. The larger canvases especially appeared awe-inspiring, boundless, and transcendental. In 1980 Robert Knott wrote, "The key issue in most recent discussions of Rothko's work can be reduced to a single word, 'sublime.'"[47] In 1978, when the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presented its first retrospective of Rothko's work, Robert Hughes noted in his review that "When it comes to interpretation, out come the violins, the woodwinds, the kettledrums, everything . . . The language of Rothko appreciation tends to be coercive, owing to a deep uncertainty about the nature of his art. Sublime, sublime, sublime, sublime: the reflexes go clickety-clack all the way down the Guggenheim ramp.'"[48] In the catalogue, the exhibition's curator, Diane Waldman, concluded her essay by affirming, "In these pure, reduced, transcendent works, Rothko makes the concrete sublime."[49] But Rothko also made the sublime concrete.

One of the first ways in which he achieved this was to darken his palette and work almost exclusively with shades of blue, brown, plum, maroon, and black. Rothko initiated the new color scheme specifically at the time of the Four Seasons commission, which was his first. In 1960 he wrote, "The dark pictures began in 1957 and have persisted

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[45] Rothko quoted in Ashton, *About Rothko*, 155.
[46] See Anfam, *MRCR*, 103n204.
[47] Robert Knott, "Review [Untitled]," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 15, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 184.
[48] Robert Hughes. "Blue Chip Sublime," *New York Review of Books,* 25, no. 20 December 21, 1978, 16.
[49] Waldman, *Rothko*, 59.

almost compulsively to this day."[50] Black would eventually become a dominant color, or, as in the case of the Houston chapel paintings, he would use deep colors so close in value that it became difficult to distinguish one hue from one another. Presented with the task of making a set of paintings for a specific architectural environment, Rothko recognized that in addition to courting the risk that they might be dismissed as mere décor, lighter or more colorful paintings would be too flimsy for his purposes. Rothko had used darker colors before, as in *Untitled (Black, Pink, and Yellow Over Orange)* (1951–52) and *Untitled No. 4* (1953, CR487), but then only to set off lighter colors and make them appear more vibrant. Rothko was also well aware of the fact that darker colors resist optical penetration to an even greater degree than do Pollock's built-up skeins of paint or the solid fields of reds, blues, or yellows that Newman used in some of his large-sized canvases. One could say that Rothko used the darker colors as "construction material." After a period of painting what could be described as diaphanous façades, Rothko intentionally wanted to build his paintings up into substantial wall-like surfaces. It is also interesting to consider Newman's remark in the context of Rothko's darkening palette: "Black is what an artist uses . . . when he is trying to break into something new."[51]

Dark color as an optical device imparts a sense of opacity to Rothko's later paintings and as such plays a part in the materiality of the work, which was becoming more pronounced. Although so often described in terms of disembodiment—radiance, sublimity, transcendence—there also exists a physical or material nature to Rothko's work, which is seldom recognized or discussed.[52] Rothko, however, often spoke about the materiality of his paintings. In 1967 he told Dore Ashton, "The difference between me and Reinhardt is that he's a mystic. By that I mean his paintings are immaterial. Mine are

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[50] Mark Rothko in letter to Ronald Alley, February 1, 1960. In *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art other than Works by British Artists* (London: Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, 1981), 657.

[51] Newman in Hess, *Newman*, 1971, 94.

[52] Jeffrey Weiss notes, "when [materiality] is accounted for at all [in Rothko's paintings], it is rarely brought to bear on the broader scope of meaning." See Weiss, "Dis-Orientation: Rothko's Inverted Canvases," in *Seeing Rothko*, eds. Glenn Phillips and Thomas Crow (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2005), 135.

here. Materially. The surfaces, the work of the brush, and so on. His are untouchable."[53] But as Richard Shiff explains, every painting has its own degree of materiality, even if the most immediate sensation a painting generates is a visual one.[54] Rothko was well aware of the differentiation this implies. He used the terms "tactile plasticity" and the "visual" or "illusory" to describe two modes of experiencing a painting.[55] Despite the amount of attention critics devoted to the latter when discussing his work, Rothko was primarily interested in the former, and from early on. He explained the difference between his notion of the tactile and the visual in 1941, in a short essay, "Plasticity," which until recently had remained unpublished.[56] For Rothko "tactile plasticity" and the "visual" were two different categories of seeing and could be described as analogous to the difference between fact and illusion. They are what distinguishes the modernists from the academicians. To make his point, Rothko compared the views of Bernard Berenson, the early twentieth-century connoisseur, to those of Edwin H. Blashfield, Berenson's contemporary, who was a well-known muralist and lecturer on the art of the Italian Renaissance. Berenson, he explained, sought the reality of *tactility* whereas Blashfield sought the reality of *appearance*. Rothko used Giotto as an example, although without citing a specific work to elucidate his view. According to Rothko, Berenson found Giotto a convincing artist because when he looked at his paintings, he could actually touch and sense the tactility of Giotto's forms. This was important to Berenson, Rothko insisted, because he demanded that his eye not only see but also feel the physical matter of the things represented in a painting: "When [Berenson] can touch forms and textures [with his eyes] he knows the painting exists."[57] He contrasted this to Blashfield, who, he believed, was interested only in the mechanics of sight, in how the eye perceives depicted

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[53] Rothko quoted in Ashton, *About Rothko*, 179. In fact, many people cannot resist touching Reinhardt's paintings. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Black Trek, Backtrack," in *Imageless, The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2008), 10–17.
[54] Richard Shiff, *Doubt* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 60.
[55] Mark Rothko, "Plasticity," in *Mark Rothko, The Artist's Reality, Philosophies of Art*, ed. Christopher Rothko (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 54.
[56] Ibid., 43–55.
[57] Ibid., 50.

objects, "he wants the picture to create an illusion that will be identical, insofar as possible, with what he observes through his sense of sight."[58] Like an impressionist, Blashfield would argue that the eye does not actually detect every blade of grass that Giotto might paint within his meadow, thus this is not how Giotto should depict it. Blashfield, he said, preferred the decorative and by this he meant what appeals to the eye. In the end, both historians love Giotto, but for different reasons—Berenson for his tactility; Blashfield for his opticality. Rothko added that this interest in tactile plasticity is what motivated the early modernists to work in collage and to attach actual materials, such as printed oilcloth, to their pictures. In the end, plasticity is a tactile quality that gives a painting the "sensations of actual existence" and imparts it with the ability to confront the viewer in a more physical rather than purely visual way.

Even if Rothko's essay is evidence that the artist strove for tactile plasticity in his work, not everyone agrees he achieved it, or that it was even his aim. Eliza Rathbone notes that because Rothko stained his cotton-duck canvas with thinned applications of oil paint, he essentially wed the pigment to the canvas support rather than allowing it to lie on top and create a material surface. She maintains that his handling of paint, coupled with its luminosity, deliberately opposes the tactile. Rathbone acknowledges that the size, verticality, and opacity of Rothko's paintings have a tendency to confront the viewer, but she also feels that they have the ability to transcend their physicality.[59] Diane Waldman argues similarly that Rothko's color becomes disembodied from the canvas and hovers in front of the paintings, engulfing the viewer in an overwhelming emotional experience. It is the exalted emotional experience, she maintains, that distinguishes the work of Rothko, Still, and Newman from Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline, who, she argues, were more concerned with the physical rather than the spiritual aspects of their painting.[60]

Rothko's approach to his paintings may have been more contemplative than Pollock's, yet if we set aside the trope of luminosity and transcendence that has become

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[58] Ibid., 51.
[59] Eliza E. Rathbone, "Mark Rothko: The Brown and Gray Paintings" in E.A. Carmean, Jr. and Eliza E. Rathbone, *American Art at Mid-Century: The Subjects of the Artist* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1978), 258.
[60] Waldman, *Rothko*, 64.

the standard lens through which to view Rothko's work, we become aware of the density, opacity, viscosity, and texture that he was able to achieve.[61] This presents a dichotomy: his paintings are the ultimate in flatness but still convey the very reality of their materiality and their three-dimensionality. One of the ways in which Rothko accomplished this was by painting the visible sides of the stretcher bars. Like Pollock and Newman, by the late 1940s Rothko had begun to leave his works unframed, which simultaneously revealed the depth of the stretcher as well as the entirety of the painted surface. While Rothko occasionally left the top and bottom of the painting's edges unpainted, beginning in 1949 he almost always painted the canvas's side edges.[62] By doing so he asserted the painting's existence as a three-dimensional object, and not merely as a two-dimensional surface. [63] By painting the plane of the canvas's sides, the artist acknowledges that the painting exists as a three-dimensional object, not merely as a single plane. Extending the painted surface ninety degrees to the stretcher's very edges is recognition of the painting as a constructed "thing" and of its status as an object. One of Rothko's studio assistants who worked with him on the Houston chapel recalls that he had referred to the paintings as "slab-like" and that Rothko seemed to like the analogy.[64]

Another way in which Rothko reinforced the object-nature of his work was by increasing the physical dimensions of his canvases. His canvases generally remain easel-sized— under five feet—up until late 1948.[65] Once he began working on the stacked, floating rectangular shapes in late 1949 (now known as the "sectional" or "classic"

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[61] John Elderfield, "Transformations," in *Seeing Rothko*, 110.

[62] See Dana Cranmer, "Painting Materials and Techniques of Mark Rothko: Consequences of an Unorthodox Approach," in *Mark Rothko 1903–1970* (New York: Stewart, Tabori, & Chang, 1997), 191.

[63] As per Eliza Rathbone, "Mark Rothko: The Brown and Gray Paintings," *Subjects of the Artists*, 267n5. There seems to be some discrepancy about this notion. Carol Mancusi-Ungaro feels that when an artist paints the edges of their canvas, it minimizes the distinction between the front of the canvas and its sides so that the viewer focuses on the picture plane. However, by painting the canvas's sides, the artist acknowledges that their painting consists of a three-dimensional object, not just a single plane. It acknowledges the canvas as a constructed "thing." See Mancusi-Ungaro, "Material and Immaterial Surface: The Paintings of Rothko" in *Mark Rothko,* 1998, 291.

[64] William Scharf in conversation with Elizabeth Rathbone, "Mark Rothko: The Brown and Gray Paintings," *Subjects of the Artists*, 267n5.

[65] An exception, which will later become the rule, is *Untitled* (1946, CR323), which measures 89 ¾ x 105 ¾ inches.

paintings), Rothko began painting on canvases where one side measured as much as eighty to nine-four inches. With the commissioned paintings intended for specific architectural environments, Rothko enlarged the canvases even further to meet the dimensions of the interior space. The progressive increase in the size of the paintings correlates with their degree of physical presence, culminating with the mid-1960s panels that Rothko completed for the Houston chapel. Sheldon Nodelman described the Houston works as "architectonisized," referring not only to the fact that they were large, but also dark in color and hard-edged, which resulted in paintings that define the interior space of the chapel architecturally.[66]

Rothko's fifth and final show at Betty Parsons took place in April 1951. It was a huge exhibition, with fifteen canvases, two of which measured over nine feet high and barely fitted on the gallery's walls.[67] Most reviewers were taken with Rothko's extraordinary palette, including Dorothy Seckler, who also noted that "Some artists, facing the fact that they have deserted such traditional expression [of easel painting], have already dreamed of forms accessory to a new architecture," and that Rothko's work awaited the perfection of such a setting.[68] It would arrive a short time later.

Defeating the Wall

Of the four artists under consideration in this study, Rothko was unarguably the most concerned with how and where his paintings were exhibited. This is not to say that Pollock and Newman were indifferent, but Rothko, from the mid-1950s on, consistently expressed the most interest in and exerted the most control over how and where his paintings were installed. At Parsons, artists traditionally took turns designing and installing each other's shows, which would have meant Rothko likely had only a partial say in how his work was hung there. It was because he wanted to assert control over the installation of his work that he rarely participated in group exhibitions, yet on occasion he

[66] Sheldon Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 181.
[67] The two largest paintings, *No. 5* (1950, CR442) and *No. 2/No. 7/No. 20* (1951, CR 451) were almost ten feet tall.
[68] Dorothy Seckler, "Reviews and Previews: Mark Rothko," *Art News,* 50, no. 3 (May 1951): 43.

would if he could have a say in their organization and display. In 1952 he was in Dorothy Miller's "Fifteen Americans" show at MoMA, one of a series of group exhibitions the museum initiated in 1929. The intent of this series was to devote considerable space, in some instances a whole gallery, to the work of each of a limited number of artists. Since its focus was to give "a broader and more effective view of individual achievement," each artist was separately exhibited, which presented Rothko with his first opportunity to exercise power over how his work would be installed.[69] He showed four new works from 1951 in addition to four paintings previously exhibited at Parsons. He oversaw the installation himself and asked that the paintings be hung so close to one another that they practically touched, resulting in an enclosed environment of wall-to-wall paintings. Yet their bright colors precluded them for being confused with walls, as Emily Genauer had done at Newman's 1951 show at Parsons. Rothko also asked for bright lighting to emphasize their brilliance. One was *No. 10* (1950, CR449), a 7 1/2-by-5-foot canvas, which Philip Johnson purchased for the museum. The painting had been exhibited the year before at Parsons, and *Interiors* had illustrated it in their article "A Symposium on How to Combine Architecture, Painting and Sculpture," about Johnson's 1951 symposium, as an example of the kind of contemporary painting that architects might consider when contemplating the inclusion of modern painting within their designs.[70]

The "Fifteen Americans" show was the first of a series of situations in which Rothko exerted increasingly more effort toward what he later referred to as "defeating the wall." In 1954, after the experience of the MoMA show, he wrote to Katherine Kuh, "By saturating the room with the feeling of the work, the walls are defeated and the poignancy of each single work had for me become more visible."[71] What exactly did Rothko mean by this? On one hand, he might have meant that by "defeating" the walls, his large-format works dissolved them, superseded them, or eclipsed them so that the paintings themselves, by virtue of the power of their own height, width, scale, color, and opacity,

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[69] Dorothy Miller, *Fifteen Americans* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1952), 5.
[70] "A Symposium on How to Combine, Architecture, Painting and Sculpture," *Interiors,* 104.
[71] Mark Rothko in letter to Katherine Kuh, September 25, 1954, Art Institute of Chicago Archives; copy in James E.B. Breslin Research Archive on Mark Rothko, 1900–1994, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

took on the function of architecture to create a spatial interior or sense of enclosure. On the other hand, it could be argued that Rothko did not mean that his canvases defeated the wall per se, but rather that their installation superseded the division between painting and wall to collaborate with the vertical surface upon which they were hung—in the spirit of Greenberg's statement that the new large canvases of ambitious art "spread over [the wall] and acknowledge its physical reality."[72] This spirit is consistent with Newman's observation about his own paintings once they began to take on size and tectonic qualities. In 1951 he recognized that he had concentrated on the wall but with the intent to "move away from the wall, destroy it . . . make a painting hostile to the environment."[73] Although cast somewhat differently from Rothko's remark, both declarations share the same underlying motive. Fearing that their paintings were too closely resembling the walls on which they were hung, both artists strove to overcome the wall and supplant it with wall-sized paintings that established their own spatial environment.

In the spring of 1954 Rothko terminated his representation with Parsons, but by that summer he and Katherine Kuh were planning his first retrospective, of his abstract paintings, scheduled to open in the fall at the Gallery of Art Interpretation at the Art Institute of Chicago.[74] Kuh, who had been hired by the Art Institute in 1943 to organize interpretative exhibitions—shows that would explain art in visual rather than verbal terms—initiated the exhibition. Rothko not only participated in the selection of works for the show, he also shared his ideas with Kuh about how the paintings should be exhibited. Since the artist had ceased talking about his work or giving statements about it sometime around 1950, his letters to Kuh provide valuable insight into how he wanted the viewer to

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[72] Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at the Moment," 1948, *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 195 (hereafter cited as *CEC*).

[73] Barnett Newman in Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker and Company, 1969), 70.

[74] Rothko had had a one-person exhibition titled "Oils and Watercolors," at the San Francisco Museum of Art, August 16–September 8, 1946, which traveled (in part) to the Santa Barbara Museum, October 1–15, which included work from the early 1940s. A selection of paintings from the Chicago show (October 18–December 31, 1954) subsequently traveled (in part) to the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, in the winter of 1955.

experience his paintings as well as into the environment he was intent on creating with them.[75] In fact, these letters are key to understanding the relationship Rothko intended the viewer to have to his paintings and reveal that his concern extended beyond the formal qualities of work and extended to the viewing encounter itself. Although he would not have articulated it as such, the strategies he outlined for exhibiting his paintings would engage the visitor in active phenomenological viewing.

The gallery Kuh had been given for her exhibitions program was badly proportioned and poorly lit, so at some point in 1943, she called upon Mies van der Rohe, who was then head of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology. At the time, Mies was involved in designing IIT's campus, but he agreed to help her redesign the gallery and immersed himself in the project. Kuh recalled that "No detail was too negligible for his scrutiny."[76] Unfortunately, photographs of Mies's design do not appear to exist and its only description comes from Kuh, which is not very informative: "On three walls of the gallery he installed a group of horizontal wood panels that were to serve as backgrounds for changing exhibits." [77] Anfam, however, has reconstructed the gallery's floorplan, which helps to visualize Rothko's exhibition.

Rothko and Kuh settled on eight paintings that dated from 1951 to 1955, which the artist thought of as a representative whole rather than a selection of individual works. The paintings varied in size, shape, color, and style, ranging from dark to bright palettes and average to monumental in size. Although Rothko had not originally conceived of these eight as group—as Newman had with his Fourteen Stations, or as Rothko himself soon would with the cycles of paintings he was to produce for the individual commissions—he nonetheless indicated in a letter to Kuh that he felt strongly about exhibiting these

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[75] In August 1950 Rothko wrote to Barnett Newman: "I simply cannot see myself proclaiming a series of nonsensical statements . . . I have nothing to say in words which I would stand for." Letter reprinted in *Rothko*, *Writings on Art*, 72.
[76] Kuh in *My Love Affair with Modern Art, Behind the Scenes with a Legendary Curator,* ed. Avis Berman (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2006)*,* 75.
[77] Ibid.

canvases as a holistic ensemble.[78] Rothko put as much thought and energy into the arrangement and installation of the paintings as he did their selection. The gallery was a single rectangular room that measured fifty by forty-one feet. Only three of its walls could be used for hanging the paintings since a bank of windows occupied the entire remaining wall, which was one of the long walls. Rothko seems not to have minded the limited amount of space in the gallery. In fact, he actually preferred it and wrote Kuh, "Some of the pictures do very well in a confined space."[79] The small space also gave him an opportunity to create an environment with his paintings.

To make up for the lack of available wall space, Kuh and Rothko employed strategies reminiscent of Peter Blake's plan for Pollock's Ideal Museum. First, a freestanding partition was installed close to the center of the gallery, on either side of which were hung two of the earliest, as well as the smallest, paintings in the show, *No. 12* (1951, CR458), a red on yellow painting that measured five by four feet, and *No. 14*, also from 1951 (CR460), of similar dimensions, which was predominantly dark purple and red. The more daring maneuver was to suspend a painting from the ceiling just a few feet beyond the gallery's entrance so that the viewer would have an immediate and direct encounter with the work the moment they walked in the room. This was the largest painting in the show, *No. 10* (1952-53, CR483), a tall and unusually broad canvas that measures ten feet tall by fourteen and a half feet wide.[80] The decision to suspend the work from the gallery's ceiling not only suited such a vast canvas, it also fulfilled one of Rothko's requests. As he wrote Kuh a few weeks before the show, he wanted to "hang the largest pictures so that they must be first encountered at close quarters, so that the first experience is to be within the picture. This may well give the key to the observer of

[78] "It would be best if all nine could be hung for I have thought of them as a group." Rothko in letter to Katharine Kuh, September 25, 1954. Copy in Breslin Research Archive, Getty Research Library.
[79] Ibid.
[80] According to David Anfam, there has been some confusion as to whether or not this *No. 10* or another painting titled *No. 10* was, in fact, in the Chicago show, but he remains convinced that it was CR483. See Anfam, *MRCR*, 100n35.

the ideal relationship between himself and the rest of the pictures."[81] With its yellow and red bands that extend the width of the broad canvas, as it hung in space from the gallery's ceiling, the painting appeared as "a wall of light."[82]

All in all, within its modest-sized room, the Chicago exhibition was a dense installation of paintings. Whichever way viewers turned, they found themselves in close contact with a Rothko, which was precisely what the artist wanted; Rothko had designed the installation to enforce an intimate encounter between the viewer and his painting. In 1951 Newman advised that his large paintings be seen from "a short distance," but Rothko was more specific. In the mid-1950s he stated that the ideal viewing distance for his canvases was eighteen inches, a distance that nowadays will set off a museum's alarm.[83] Like Newman, Rothko wanted his canvases to fill the viewer's entire field of vision, both frontal and peripheral. In the same letter to Kuh, he indicated his fears as well as his intentions for the grouping by describing how his work had been hung in the "Fifteen Americans" exhibition:

> Since my pictures are large, colorful and unframed, and since museum walls are usually immense and formidable, there is the danger that the pictures relate themselves as decorative areas to the walls. This would be a distortion of their meaning, since the pictures are intimate and intense, and are the opposite of what is decorative, and have been painted in a scale of normal living rather than an institutional scale. I have on occasion successfully dealt with this problem by tending to crowd the show rather than making it spare. By saturating the room with the feeling of the work, the walls are defeated and the poignancy of each single work had for me

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[81] Rothko in letter to Kuh, September 25, 1954, Copy in Breslin Research Archive, Getty Research Library.
[82] Hubert Crehan, "Rothko's Wall of Light" A Show of His New Work at Chicago," *Art Digest* 29 (November 1, 1954): 5, 19.
[83] Rothko to Daniel Bell. See Teresa Hensick and Paul M. Whitmore, "Rothko's Harvard Murals," in *Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 1988), 15.

become more visible.[84]

Rothko had a more intimate venue in Chicago, yet he wanted to be assured that the viewer would have a viewing experience that was as intense as it was intimate. One way to ensure this was to crowd the room with his paintings, which is what he instructed Kuh to do.

The intimacy Rothko sought was implied by the very size of his canvases. Rothko had attended Philip Johnson's 1951 symposium, "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture." During the question and answer period, Johnson singled out Rothko, who was not a participant in the symposium but merely an audience member, and asked if he had anything to add to the discussion. Rothko explained to the assembled architects why he painted large pictures. The full version of his statement is worth quoting here:

> I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is painting something very grandiose and very pompous. The reason why I paint large pictures, however—and I think it applies to some of the other painters I know—is precisely because I want to be very intimate and very human. From my point of view, at this particular time, to paint a small picture is to sort of place yourself outside your experience, that is, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you can paint the larger picture, you are in it. It isn't something that you command or control, but you are having a completely intimate experience, and perhaps it is impossible for people today to paint grandiose pictures, and perhaps it is a very good thing that they don't paint grandiose pictures.[85]

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[84] Rothko to Kuh, September 25, 1954, Copy in Breslin Research Archive, Getty Research Library.

[85] Rothko statement in transcript of the "Symposium on *Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture*," the Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 19, 1951, Philip Johnson Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Rothko's statement about creating a very intimate and very human experience with his large paintings, an experience of being "in" the picture, implies that he wished extend the dimension of the canvas into the physical realm of the body's presence. In other words, the painting was to be experienced phenomenologically—an experience that involved the viewer spatially and kinesthetically as well as visually. By extension, this notion of extending the canvas into the realm of the viewer suggests the creation of an environment particular to the viewing experience, or as Newman would have put it, "a sense of place." Rothko would use this exact word too, but not until he felt he had fully achieved an actual "place."

Measure of Man

Scale is of tremendous importance to me—human scale.

—Mark Rothko, 1958[86]

In the Chicago show, two 10-by-5 1/2-foot paintings, *No. 1* (1954; CR 503) and *No. 11* (1954; CR511), hung on the north wall of the gallery, and on the south wall hung two tall and narrow canvases that were placed somewhat closer to one another in comparison to those on the opposite wall. At approximately eight by five feet, the latter two paintings, *No. 6* (1954; CR 505) and *No. 7* (1955; CR491) each possess an obviously upright and anthropomorphic aspect. In fact, at eight feet tall they are at the same human scale that Newman preferred for his canvases. Also like Newman, Rothko liked to hang his paintings as close to the floor as possible, usually not more than six inches above it, which was the height at which they had been painted in the studio.[87] As the 1950s advanced and size of Rothko's paintings grew larger, he became increasingly more concerned with the correlation between the size of the canvas, the scale of the painting,

[86] Mark Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute, November 1958," in *Rothko Writings on Art,* 128.
[87] "I also hang the pictures rather low rather than high, and particularly in the case of the largest ones, often as close to the floor as is feasible, for that is how they are painted." Rothko to Kuh, September 25, 1954, Copy in Breslin Research Archive, Getty Research Library. Commissioned "murals," however, were to be hung higher, at least three feet above the floor. See Mark Rothko, "Instructions for Exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery," in *Rothko,* 2008, 96.

and its relationship to the viewer. For many abstract expressionists of Rothko's generation, and for Rothko himself, the canvas became a surrogate for the human body once they left the easel behind. This is particularly true with vertical canvases that also echo the width of outstretched arms. The vertical format is more frequent in Rothko's oeuvre than the horizontal; in fact, from the mid-1950s into the 1960s, the majority of Rothko's paintings are taller than they are wide. Rothko had an especially keen sense of human scale. Anfam notes that he was "fascinated—in the verticality of his signature style—with rectangles that metaphorically articulate a human scale."[88] Peter Selz wrote in the catalogue essay to Rothko's 1961 MoMA exhibition, "He paints pictures which are in fact related to man's scale and his measure. But whereas in Renaissance painting man was the measure of space, in Rothko's painting space is the measure of man, i.e., the picture, is the measure of man."[89] The act of looking at a vertical painting has a bodily effect upon the viewer in addition to a visually perceptual one. It enacts a viewing encounter in which the spectator can physically identify with the painting's dimensions, in which the picture is indeed the measure of the man. Brian O'Doherty was sensitive to the particular accord between Rothko's work and the human body when he wrote, "Still's figure is small and awe-struck—the Grand Canyon observer. . . . Reinhardt . . . rejected scale (and anthropomorphism) by limiting himself to his five-by-five squares, a size neither too small nor too big, but set constantly like the pages of a book. . . . Rothko's figure is carefully designed in terms of human engineering. Before a Pollock [or a horizontal Newman painting, one might add], people wander to and fro. Before a Rothko each finds a spot appropriate to his own size and tends to stay there, or leave and return."[90] This would become increasingly important to Rothko, even as the paintings expanded into larger formats.

In a rare lecture that Rothko gave at the Pratt Institute in October 1958, the artist revisited what he had said in 1951, "Since I am involved with the human element, I want to create a state of intimacy—an immediate transaction. Large pictures take you into

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[88] Anfam, *MRCR*, 49.
[89] Selz, *Rothko*, 9.
[90] Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko," *Art International,* no. 14 (October 20, 1970): 37.

them." But at Pratt he added, "Scale is of tremendous importance to me—human scale."[91] This may be the first time he publicly spoke about scale, yet he had defined it twenty years earlier in an unpublished notebook as "the relationship of objects to their surroundings—the emphasis of thing *or* space," continuing, "It definitely involves a *space* emotion."[92] For Rothko, scale was a felt thing, something that was experienced emotionally, and yet considering how he later talked about his paintings, one can imagine he presumed a physical experience of scale as well, which obviously parallels Newman's conception of scale.

A number of Rothko's unpublished sketchbooks provide clues to his understanding of scale and proportion, which Oliver Wick recently had the opportunity to examine. Rothko's unpublished *Golde's Composition Sketchbook* (1947–49) is evidence of the importance of scale and proportion to Rothko's development.[93] His musings on scale were concurrent with Newman's experience at the Ohio mounds, where Newman first became fully aware of the possibilities of scale in relationship to his paintings. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Newman and Tony Smith were engaged in an ongoing conversation on the concept of human scale, and it is possible that Rothko participated in the dialogue. According to Wick, Rothko may have borrowed Newman's copy of *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* as part of the intellectual exchange that took place between them in the late 1940s.[94] There is, in fact, a drawing in the *Golde's Sketchbook* that alludes to Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man* (1490), which suggests a stick figure placed against a Rothko painting typical of his work in the mid-1950s. The single figure has two stances within the image—with legs stretched wide and with legs together. Rothko emphasized the impression of verticality with up-and-down pen strokes. Although

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[91] Mark Rothko, "Address to Pratt Institute, November 1958," in *Rothko Writings on Art,* 128.
[92] Rothko in unpublished *Scribble Book*, c. late 1930s–early 1940s, reproduced in *Seeing Rothko*, 252.
[93] See Oliver Wick, "'Do They Negate Each Other," in *Mark Rothko* (Milan: Skira, 2008), 5–25. The unpublished notebooks are identified by their brand names such as *Fair Play Compositions* and *Golde's*. The notebooks are located in the Mark Rothko Family Archive, but Wick has reproduced a few pages from these notebooks in his essay.
[94] Wick refers specifically to *The Notebooks of Leonardo*, edited by Edward MacCurdy and published in 1941–42. Ibid., 8n7.

Leonardo's figure may not have served as direct model, Rothko is unarguably interested in searching for the right proportion and scale in relation to the human figure. On the endpapers of the composition book, Rothko jotted "the size of man."[95]

Rothko could be ambiguous when asked about the size of his paintings. At one time he told Kuh that "The pictures have no size. They are exactly the right size for the idea." Then he told her to simply forget about size when looking at this paintings. "Size," he grumbled, "only has to do with real estate."[96] Yet size as the relationship of the painting's dimensions to human scale was of utmost importance to him. Fragmentary notes from a 1954 sketchbook, also unpublished, suggest that Rothko fused his conception of size and scale with intimacy. One note reads "the idea of scale—intimacy; the whole man," which is the same conception he had expressed to Johnson and his audience in 1951.[97] By "intimacy" he likely meant a viewing relationship that implied a direct rather than distant rapport with his paintings, both emotionally and physically. Even if the paintings were large, Rothko did not intend the viewer to look at them as at a mural painting from afar. Yet it was also in 1954 that Rothko wrote in yet another unpublished sketchbook, "If I chose—search for a single word or name to collect these thoughts, it would be size."[98]

In 1954, the year that Rothko made so many notes on size and scale, Ben Heller visited the artist's studio and later noted how small it was and that the paintings were large. "They so filled the space that you had no room. . . . I could not wander. . . . I felt then what I later learned: that Rothkos, Pollocks, Newmans, and Stills were all painted and *conceived* in relatively small spaces, that their scale was between man and painting, that the relationship between the physical size of the work and the viewer was crucial."[99] Recall O'Doherty's statement that "Before a Rothko each finds a spot appropriate to his

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[95] Ibid., 8.
[96] Rothko quoted in Katherine Kuh, *My Love Affair with Modern Art,*154.
[97] Rothko in *Fair Play Compositions* unpublished sketchbook, 1954, in Wick, "Do They Negate Each Other," 9.
[98] Rothko in *The Property of* unpublished sketchbook, 1954, Ibid., 9.
[99] Ben Heller, "Reminiscences of a Passionate Collector," in *Mark Rothko* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001), 179 (italics in the original).

own size and tends to stay there, or leave and return."[100] John Elderfield, in response to O'Doherty's claim, suggests that properly calibrating a painting's internal scale to the human scale of the viewer results in a rewarded position.[101] Rothko appears to have mastered this "calibration" not only to human scale, but also to the architecture's interior enclosure, which is why Nodelman refers to his paintings as "architectonisized."[102]

Controlled Environments

> *The progression of a painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be toward clarity: toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer.*
> —Mark Rothko, 1949[103]

In 1955 Rothko moved to Sidney Janis Gallery and had his first exhibition there that year. As in Chicago, he showed the paintings as he wanted to exhibit them. At this point in his career, Rothko preferred not to exhibit his work if he was not able to install it himself. The Janis show proved once again that what he wanted to achieve with the display of his work was a total environment (fig. 5.2). He included twelve canvases, but rather than showing just two or three of his large-sized paintings as he had done in Chicago, this time they all measured between six and ten feet high; one canvas, *No. 20 (Yellow Expanse)* (1953) reached over fourteen feet wide. The paintings literally hung from ceiling to floor. In fact, in installation photographs two of them look like they are resting against the wall, too tall to wedge into their allotted space. The arrangement of the paintings was Rothko's deliberate course of action and not a consequence of limited gallery space. Janis allowed the artist to hang the show himself and later recalled, "[Rothko] did every lick of work. He wouldn't let our staff do a thing."[104] The walls were so crowded with paintings that the visitor entered a space delimited almost entirely by

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[100] O'Doherty, "Rothko," 37.
[101] "Seeing Rothko." 103.
[102] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 181.
[103] Rothko, "Statement on His Attitude in Painting," *The Tiger's Eye,* no. 9 (October 1949): 114. Reprinted in *Rothko, Writings on Art*, 65.
[104] Breslin, *Rothko*, 337.

Rothko's work. The installation prompted Robert Coates to remark, "The gallery has . . . crammed its walls with Rothkos hung so close that there are tensions not only within but between the pictures."[105] This sense of tension within a packed space hearkens back to Rothko's figurative paintings of the 1930s. In these early works one can imagine the depicted figures' feeling trapped by the compressed architectural spaces. Rothko himself had experienced the confining space of Michelangelo's Laurentian Library when he visited Florence in 1950, and by the mid-1950s Rothko was designing installations of his paintings in which it was his viewers who were confronted with this sensation of enclosure or even entrapment. Conveying a sense of entrapment appealed to Rothko because he felt it forced the viewer into a direct confrontation with his paintings. Anfam describes this as "spatial dramaturgy" and notes that Rothko had at one time envisioned having visitors enter the Houston chapel by means of an underground passageway.[106]

In fact, from this point forward this is precisely how Rothko wanted his paintings to be shown—with the work confronting the viewer in close space defined by the paintings. In subsequent installations, the paintings increasingly come to displace the environment and replace it with one of their own making. He repeated these installation strategies for his 1957 exhibition at the Houston Contemporary Arts Museum, designing separate rooms that he arranged by color, which according to Campbell Geeslin of the Houston Post, proved "startlingly effective."[107] In the late 1950s Duncan Phillips began purchasing Rothko paintings with the intent of installing them in their own room, an annex built especially for them next to the main building of the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC. Phillips and Rothko worked out the arrangement of the four paintings that Phillips had collected—*Green and Maroon* (1953), and *Ochre and Red on Red* (1954), *Green and Tangerine on Red* (1956), and *Orange and Red on Red* (1957)—with a maquette supplied by the architects. The annex was completed and the paintings installed in November 1960. As the first permanent installation of a group of Rothko's paintings

[105] Robert M. Coates, "The Art Galleries: Pros and Semi-Pros," *New Yorker* (April 23, 1955): 121–122.
[106] Anfam, *MRCR*, 36.
[107] Campbell Geeslin, "Exhibit of Rothko at Museum," *Houston Post*, September 8, 1957.

within an architectural environment designed specifically to house it, the Phillips room likely informed and inspired Rothko's thinking about future presentations of his work and anticipated the Houston chapel, Rothko's final project.

Soon after the completion of the Rothko room at the Phillips, Rothko had a major retrospective at MoMA, which opened in January 1961. William Seitz organized the show, which included work from 1946 to 1961, and Rothko, with the assistance of Wilder Green, MoMA's exhibition coordinator, was very involved in the selection, hanging, lighting, and overall design of the galleries. When the show traveled to London's Whitechapel Gallery, he sent explicit instructions on how he felt the show was to be installed.[108] When the show traveled to Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, the installation instructions likely followed.[109] Giulio Carlo Argan titled his review of the Rome show "Rothko: The Wall As Painting," which he published in Bruno Zevi's magazine *L'Architettura*.[110] Argan's characterization of the "wall as painting" seems most apt of works from the later 1950s, in which the play of internal rectangular shapes condenses from a configuration of multiple elements into one of larger and more emphatic shapes of limited number, which convey a sense of "all-at-onceness" to the viewer. Soon these would evolve into single encompassing color realms, marking a final transition from wall-like paintings to paintings as walls.

The Three Commissions

> *It would be no exaggeration to claim that if the mural commissions had not arisen, Rothko would have had to invent them.*

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[108] See Mark Rothko, "Instructions for Exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1961, 'Suggestions from Mr. Mark Rothko Regarding Installation of His Paintings," in *Rothko,* 2008, 96.

[109] The exhibition, *Mark Rothko A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945–1960,* had several different European venues following its New York debut, which included (in chronological order): London, Whitchapel Art Gallery; Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum; Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts; Basel, Kunsthalle; Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna; and Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

[110] Giulio Carlo Argan, "Rothko: la parete come pittura," *Salvezza e Caduta nell'are Moderna: Studi I note II* (Milan, 1964); reprinted and translated into English in Oliver Wick, *Mark Rothko* (Milan: Skira, 2008), 204–205.

—David Anfam, author *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas, Catalogue Raisonné*[111]

In 1958 Rothko received the first of three commissions that together would occupy him for almost all the remaining years of his life. Each commission—the Four Seasons restaurant in New York's Seagram Building (1958–60), Harvard's Holyoke Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, (1961–64), and the Rothko Chapel in Houston (1964–70)—arrived so closely on the heels of the last that, as Anfam points out, they can almost be thought of as one continuous project.[112] The three sets of paintings constitute a thematic and formal continuum as well, in which painting as painting evolved into painting in/as architecture. The architectural destinations contributed to the hardening of Rothko's pictorial forms as well as the total shift in his palette, culminating in the dark, single-formed, hard-edged canvases of the Houston Chapel. However, one senses from Rothko's preceding commitment to the creation of a spatial environment through the installation of his work that it was not so much the commissions that drove his development, but more that they arrived at a felicitous juncture in his work. As Anfam notes, if Rothko had not received these commissions, he "would have had to invent them."[113] The significance of this body of work lies not only in the fact that the paintings begin to eclipse the architecture, but that they also signal a subtle yet definitive transition from abstract expressionism to minimalism, which by the late 1960s had become an identifiable movement.

The story of the Seagram murals Mural commission is now well known, but is summarized here to contextualize Rothko's project.[114] In the early 1950s Samuel Bronfman, who had achieved mythic success as founder of one of the world's largest liquor manufacturers and distributors, decided to build a new and distinctly modern office building for the New York headquarters of his company, Seagram. He enlisted his

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[111] Ibid., 89.
[112] Ibid., 89.
[113] Ibid., 89.
[114] See Michael Compton, "Introduction," *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1988) and, more recently, Achim Borchardt-Hume, "Shadows of Light: Mark Rothko's Late Series," in *Rothko: The Late Series* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 13–28.

daughter Phyllis Bronfman Lambert, an architect in her own right, to select the appropriate candidate to design and construct the building. She considered Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and a number of others, but the job went to Mies van der Rohe. In November 1954 Bronfman contracted Mies to be the building's architect, in collaboration with his associate Philip Johnson. The original plan was to have an automobile showroom in the lobby, at another point a bank was considered, but it was eventually decided that Mies's building called for a serious restaurant on its lobby floor, one that would be as relevant to its time as the building itself was. On June 6, 1958, Rothko's dealer Sidney Janis wrote to Lambert confirming that the artist would provide "500 to 600 square feet of paintings," for installation in the dining room of the building's ground-floor restaurant, The Four Seasons, designed by Johnson.[115] The purchase order described the commissioned paintings as "Building Decorations"—which in retrospect can be read as the first indication of what ultimately turned into an ill-fated project.

One of Lambert's assignments was to "decorate" the public spaces and private offices with art that befit the building, and when it came to Johnson's restaurant, both she and the architect enthusiastically turned to Rothko. Johnson had known the artist since at least since 1949, when he advised Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III on the purchase of a Multiform painting. In 1951 he readily recognized Rothko in the audience at his symposium on architecture and painting and sculpture, when Rothko famously spoke about why he painted large paintings. The next month Johnson purchased *No. 10* (1950, CR 449) for the Museum of Modern Art. By the late 1950s Rothko was a well-known artist who had been showing regularly at Parsons and Janis. Lambert was also obviously enthusiastic about his work. She had known of Rothko's painting since 1954 and purchased his *Brown and Blacks in Red* (1957) for the Seagram collection in 1958.

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[115] Lambert was also responsible for securing prints, posters, tapestries, paintings, and sculpture for the private as well as public areas of the building. She considered these "decorations" to be integral to the space. She became aware of Rothko's work in 1954, and soon purchased his *Brown and Black in Reds* (1958) for the Seagram collection in 1958. Rothko and Johnson first became acquainted in 1949 when Johnson advised Mrs. John D. Rockefeller III on the purchase of a Multiform painting Johnson clearly recognized Rothko in the audience at the 1951 symposium and obviously knew of his work. See Breslin, *Rothko*, 373.

The commission appealed to Rothko for a number of different reasons. His interest in making murals for public spaces went back to the 1930s, when he participated in the federal mural competitions. It may also have been because Henri Matisse and Joán Miró, whom he respected and whose work he had emulated early in his artistic development, had both been involved in large-scale commissions. Matisse had designed murals, stained glass windows, and liturgical vestments for the chapel in Vence in 1948–51, and in 1947 Miró had completed a 38 ½-foot-long mural in New York, destined for the penthouse restaurant of the new and modern Terrace Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati. Rothko may have either seen Miró's mural in New York, where it was temporarily installed at the Museum of Modern Art, or in Cincinnati, where he visited his family.[116] Closer to home, three of his good friends, Gottlieb, Ferber, and Motherwell, had contributed a curtain design, sculpture, and painting, respectively, to the B'nai Israel synagogue in Millburn, NJ. But even without these influences, Rothko's interest in producing paintings for specific architectural environments had obviously been longstanding, which is why he attended Johnson's 1951 symposium. The Seagram commission offered him his first opportunity to work directly with a modernist architect, Johnson. As an architect, by 1958 Johnson was known for the New York apartment he had designed for Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, but he had earned considerable renown for his Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut (1949). And Rothko was also impressed with Mies's work as an architect, his "architectural integrity and precision of design."[117] Rothko, in fact, referred to his collaboration with the two architects as a "jointed scheme."[118] However, the most important motivation for Rothko's acceptance of the Seagram commission may have been one that had been gathering for some time. According to Dan Rice, his studio assistant at that time, Rothko accepted the commission because "He realized the challenge that it offered him to build an environment."[119] The commission was the ultimate opportunity to create a painterly environment that unified

[116] Ibid., 377.
[117] Compton, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project*, 10.
[118] Dore Ashton, "Rothko's Frame of Mind," in *Seeing Rothko*, 21.
[119] Dan Rice interviewed by Arnold Glimcher, *Mark Rothko: The 1958–1959 Murals: Second Series* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1978), n.p.

art and architecture, and one that would simultaneously enforce a direct and intimate encounter between the viewer and his work.

In July of 1958 Rothko rented a former YMCA gymnasium at 222 Bowery, in which he erected a scaffold and built makeshift temporary walls that approximated the dimensions of the Four Seasons' dining room. The dining room where Rothko's paintings were to be installed was separate from the larger Pool Room section of the restaurant and was accessible via a short and narrow set of stairs. The "Rothko Room," twice as long as it was wide, measured fifty-six by twenty-seven feet, with a bank of windows along its short north side and the entrance in the long east wall. Rothko's studio recreation, however, did not account for the window or for the set of doors that interrupted the expanse of the east wall. Further, the dimensions of his studio did not match those of the restaurant. Instead, the studio measured forty-six by thirty-two feet with a voluminous twenty-three-foot-high ceiling. These discrepancies would ultimately affect what he created for the restaurant, which became all too clear when he visited the dining room a year later upon the room's completion.

The Seagram murals represented not only Rothko's first architectural commission, but also the first time that he worked on a series of paintings to be viewed specifically as a complete ensemble. He was obviously anxious about the commission because he produced three different sets of paintings to arrive at what he felt was the correct scheme. This resulted in total of thirty different canvases. According to Ashton, Rothko was trying to find the right emotional tone, yet the room also presented challenges that his "classic" sectionals from the period did not adequately meet.[120] It seems that he first began with a set of paintings in the style of his classic paintings, a format he later abandoned. *No. 9 (White and Black on Wine)* (1958) is thought to be from the first set. It is a nine-by-fourteen-foot canvas that features a solid white bar hovering over a larger maroon band, which in turn floats above a narrower black strip. It has been determined that in this painting Rothko's palette progressed from a fiery orange red to a final deep plum, black, and white. This reduction in color likely had to do with Rothko's

[120] Ashton, "Rothko's Frame of Mind," in *Seeing Rothko*, 23.

concern over how to integrate his work with the architecture. The brighter colors, as noted, were often equated with the decorative, which he was at pains to avoid. Further, Rothko understood that a darker palette resists optical penetration, as darks do not convey a sense of depth or recessionary space. Instead, the eye reacts to the painting as if it were an opaque surface.

Of the three sets of paintings, it is difficult to determine which canvases Rothko would have selected for installation and where he would have placed them. In fact, Rothko may have never determined a final selection, although Michael Compton has made a compelling case for a conjectural arrangement.[121] Suffice it to say here that Rothko envisioned a number of different scenarios. At one point he seems to have considered installing one nine-by-fourteen-foot canvas on the long west wall. He may also have planned to hang a series of paintings edge to edge along the same wall, as he would do at the Holyoke Center. On either side of the entrance, which punctuated the east wall, Rothko likely intended a series of paintings each nine feet tall and anywhere from six to twelve feet long. The short south wall, which faced the bank of windows on the opposite wall, seems to have given Rothko the most difficulty. At one time, it seems, he considered painting the wall directly, which would have resulted in a wall as a painting rather than paintings as walls.

Rothko worked on several of the Seagram murals simultaneously, moving from painting to painting and occasionally interchanging later canvases with earlier ones from another set. This makes it impossible to differentiate between the supposed individual series. But they all have several things in common. The Seagram murals are the most reductive paintings in terms of color, facture, and internal shape that Rothko had made to date. They were also some of the largest canvases he had ever produced. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that Rothko devised an entirely new pictorial scheme in which he abandoned his classic format of stacked rectangular forms and instead produced compositions in which a play of positive and negative forms evoke architectural elements

[121] See Compton, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project* (London: Tate Gallery, 1988). In 1988–89, the Tate Gallery, London, organized an exhibition with a reconstruction of the dining room and reenactment of how Compton believes the paintings were installed.

such as windows, doorways, and portals. This "imagery" is a result of Rothko's decision to turn the paintings on their side, thus the horizontal rectangles instantly became verticals, reminiscent of pillars. As Anfam notes, "The murals were meant to supplant the walls of Philip Johnson's Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagram building. They would, that is, be tantamount to architecture," with their internal "images" acting as "a surrogate environment."[122] Compton agrees, noting that the architectural motifs appealed to Rothko because he understood that the Seagram paintings would be placed high on the walls rather than at his customary low level, which was in the immediate realm of the viewer. At this elevated location, the paintings "would be scanned as a group by eyes moving predominantly in a horizontal plane, that is, they would be seen as architecture."[123] Rothko's last dealer, Arne Glimcher, was struck by the architectural elements that appear so prominently in the Seagram murals and after the artist's death asked Rothko's assistant, Dan Rice, whether they had been intentional. Rice replied, "Oh, definitely, yes . . . I do think of them as portals; I do think of them as windows very definitely in architectural terms, and so did Mark."[124]

While continuing his investigation into issues of size, scale, and place, Rothko also drew upon his knowledge and love of historical examples as sources of inspiration for the Seagram murals. He looked to the Doric columns of the temples at Paestum, the frescos of Pompeii's Villa the Mysteries, the Boscoreale frescos at the Metropolitan Museum, and Fra Angelico's frescos in San Marco. But perhaps most influential of all was Michelangelo's Laurentian Library with its vestibule of false doors and blind windows and its corridor-like reading room. He later told an acquaintance that he wanted to create the same effect as Michelangelo had in the Laurentian vestibule: "He achieved just the kind of feeling I'm after—he makes the viewers feel that they are trapped in a

[122] Anfam, *MRCR*, 90.
[123] Compton, *Mark Rothko, The Seagram Mural Project*, 12.
[124] Rice interviewed by Glimcher, *Mark Rothko: The 1958–1959 Murals*, n.p.

room where all the doors and windows are bricked up, so that all they can do is butt their heads forever against the wall."[125]

For a variety of reasons, in the spring of 1960 Rothko withdrew from the commission, yet he must have felt a degree of success with these paintings, which he retained.[126] Rothko later said that when accepting the commission, his one condition had been that the location be an enclosed space. As he wrote in his notes on the Seagram commission, "I have always maintained that if I should be given an enclosed space which I could surround with my work it would be the realization of a dream that I have always held."[127] In October 1959 Ashton stopped to visit with him in his studio, as she often did. Rothko had the murals set up, which he had been working on throughout that summer and into the fall. Within the enclosed space of his studio with its high ceiling, with just a minimum of light coming through a row of small and grimy windows set high up on one wall, and likely surrounded by three hundred square feet of deep maroon and crimson canvases, he turned to her and said, "I have made a place."[128]

While scholars have proposed a number of different scenarios for the placement and arrangement of the paintings within the restaurant's interior space, it is difficult to imagine how, exactly, they could have worked. Johnson installed wood-paneled walls with vertical joints that protrude across the length of the long wall. These vertical joints are also present on the short wall, where there is an additional, single horizontal joint running its entire length. The ceiling is composed of rows of squares. The room is a

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[125] Fischer, "The Easy Chair: Mark Rothko, Portrait of the Artist as an Angry Man," 1970, reprinted in *Rothko, Writings on Art*, 131.

[126] It is difficult to determine exactly why Rothko reneged on the commission. It's generally accepted that when the artist finally saw the completed space for which the paintings were intended, he was displeased by the space and offended by the fact that it was designated for the wealthy rather than an employees' cafeteria, as he initially believed. Werner Haftmann rightly assessed the situation: "[Rothko] wished to achieve much more than his client wanted, and the plan inevitably failed because of this incompatibility." Werner Haftmann, *Mark Rothko* (Zurich: Kunsthaus, 1971), ix. Rothko sold off the first set of paintings as individual works. In 1968–69, he gifted a group of nine paintings to the Tate Gallery, London, which were selected from the second and third series. The remaining paintings can be found at the National Gallery, Washington, DC, and Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, Chiba Prefecture, Japan.

[127] Rothko, "Notes on the Seagram Mural Commission," Autumn 1960, in Wick, *Mark Rothko*, 169.

[128] Rothko in Ashton, *About Rothko*, 155.

cacophony of vertical and horizontal lines, which would have destroyed the integrity of any of the paintings that Rothko prepared for the restaurant. Adding to the visual noise is diamond-patterned wall-to-wall carpeting. At one point Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* (1952) hung on the west wall, holding the place intended for Rothko's murals. Many years later James Rosenquist's seven-by-twenty-four-foot *Flowers, Fish, and Females* (1984) was installed, a multiple-image painting that combines dense floral motifs rendered in heated-up tropical colors, within which are two smallish fish, with two pop-art-large, smooth faces of young women.

The Holyoke Center

In March of 1962, not long after withdrawing his paintings from the Seagram commission, Rothko embarked on another series of commissioned paintings, this time for the penthouse of the Holyoke Center at Harvard University.[129] With the Holyoke commission Rothko continued some of the ideas he had initiated with the Seagram murals and developed them even further. Once again he chose to work in serial form using opaque colors within a predominantly dark palette. Here, too, he sought to create an environment by covering the walls of a comparably sized room with over five hundred square feet of canvas. Again he employed architectural motifs inspired by art historical sources, although here as in the Seagram murals, Rothko's enlarged and vague approximations of doors, portals, columns, and post-and-lintel configurations appear almost tantamount to architecture. All these factors heightened the sense of his paintings being seen as well as experienced as architecture.

The Holyoke commission also presented Rothko with a second opportunity to work directly with a modernist architect, this time Josep Lluís Sert, a close friend and collaborator of Le Corbusier. In 1953 Sert had succeeded Walter Gropius as dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design. The Holyoke Center is an H-shaped mixed-use

[129] Rothko had been commissioned in 1961 by Professor Wassily Leontief, Chairman of the Society of Fellows and Professor of Economics at Harvard University, and John P. Coolidge, Director of the Fogg Art Museum. See Marjorie B. Cohn et al, *Mark Rothko's Harvard Murals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 1988) for the most comprehensive account of the mural project and the subsequent de-installation of the paintings.

complex of shops, offices, and a health center. The ten-storey concrete structure is set back from the street and is best known, perhaps, for its pedestrian plazas. Holyoke was Sert's first building on Harvard's campus, although other examples of modern architecture, including Gropius's Graduate School dormitories and Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center had been built there previously (completed in 1963). John Coolidge, who was the director of Harvard's Fogg Art Museum, felt that while Harvard had a good representation of modernist architecture, the university needed to demonstrate its commitment to contemporary American art. The Holyoke Center provided an excellent opportunity to combine exemplary architecture and art.[130]

Rothko's paintings were originally intended for the meeting room of the Harvard Society of Fellows, but in 1961, when rental costs in the center proved prohibitive for the society, Harvard decided to use the Holyoke Center's penthouse as a dining room for their various functions. Once again Rothko's paintings were destined for an environment of dining. He was well aware of the change in plans and may have acquiesced when he was assured that the diners would consist of distinguished academics rather than an elite group of the merely rich. Harvard officials originally had in mind a single mural for the dining room's one long wall, but Rothko decided upon a series of panels that would cover more surface area, surround the viewer, and result in the creation of "a place." He did not think it possible to achieve such an ambience with just a single painting, but just as importantly, a single painting hung on one long wall might have appeared too decorative, which for Rothko would have been the ultimate failure.

The Holyoke penthouse measured forty-eight feet long and twenty feet wide, which with floor-to-ceiling windows at the short ends (or north and south sides), made the room feel like a Kleenex box. Its dimensions did not vary greatly from that of the Four Seasons room, but there the bank of windows occupied only one end of the room. Rothko immediately recognized the challenge that such a long, narrow rectangle of a

[130] As per the terms of their agreement, Rothko would gift the panels to Harvard University, which in turn would pay for the costs of Rothko's materials, his transportation to and from Cambridge, and any slight remodeling of the room such as changing the color of the walls and curtains. See Cohn, *Harvard Murals*, 8.

room presented. He had inspected the space while it was still under construction and at one point tried to exert some control over its design, but Coolidge intervened and convinced Rothko that the architect had a right to his creative freedom, too. Rothko and Sert corresponded during Holyoke's construction, but there is no evidence of the architect altering his plans for the artist, nor is there any indication of what changes Rothko might have wanted. Such were the trials for Rothko in working with a modern architectural environment in the making, yet he arrived at a solution.

The main task for Rothko was to fill the long western wall, in addition to its opposite eastern wall, which was, however, punctured by a double doorway in which the two doors were separated by four feet of intervening wall. Further, although the western wall measured forty-eight feet long, it contained a thirty-three-foot section that was recessed to a depth of about six feet (fig. 5.3). As he had done with the Seagram commission, Rothko originally planned to prepare three or four sets of murals from which he would select the appropriate group for the dining room, but before long Rothko arrived at the canvases he wanted. In the end, he only completed six panels for the project (CR 737-742), from which he selected five for the installation—one triptych on the western wall and two individual panels along the eastern wall.[131]

The preliminary hanging of the paintings took place in January 1963. The triptych, composed of *Panels One, Two,* and *Three* (1962, CR737, 738, 739), extended thirty-three feet overall and fit squarely within the recessed area of the western wall. *Panels Four* and *Five* (1962, CR740, 741) were installed opposite the triptych on the eastern wall, where they flanked the double doorway. As Rothko requested, the paintings were hung approximately two feet from the floor, yet at 8 1/2 feet high (the same height as the Four Seasons panels), the Holyoke paintings rise to the ceiling and supplant the surface of the upper wall in its entirety. Similar to the Seagram murals, here, too, Rothko employed vertical forms that suggest columns or pilasters. In fact, with details such as the

[131] Anfam has recently determined that Rothko likely intended to install two predellas below the two longest panels: *Panel Two* and *Panel Four*. Each of the predellas measure 21 7/8" x 178 7/8", which suggest to Anfam "extenuated images—objects might be a better word." Although the predellas were never used, one of them was "readopted" during the Chapel project. Anfam, *MRCR*, 94.

keystones in *Panels One*, *Four*, *Five,* and *Six*, the references to architecture in the Holyoke paintings are more explicit than in any of the Seagram series.[132] This may be because Rothko painted their contours with a higher degree of articulation than the softer-edged forms of the earlier commission. Further, the contrast between lights and darks in the Holyoke panels makes the column-forms appear to actually project out toward the viewers and into their space, with the dominant background color of the panels appearing as shadows or voids causing the vertical forms to move forward.[133] The repetition of these vertical forms suggests a colonnade and recalls Rothko's early subway paintings with their frieze-like arrangements of metal railings.

Unfortunately, due to direct sunlight from the two walls of floor-to-ceiling windows, frequent mishaps, and outright vandalism, Rothko's paintings began to deteriorate within five years of their installation in the Holyoke Center. Within ten years one panel had completely faded and was removed from view. In 1979 all of the paintings were transferred to an off-site storage facility, exhibited only twice, in 1988 and 1993, both times at Harvard's Arthur M. Sackler Museum. The paintings are inaccessible, even to scholars, yet Rothko's biographer, James Breslin, has pieced together photographs and documentation to reconstruct their configuration within the penthouse (which has since been converted into offices for the Harvard Real Estate Corporation).[134] Thus my analysis of the installation relies largely upon photographs in addition to Breslin's scholarship.

One of the most striking aspects of the large triptych that hung on the western wall is that its internal elements lack balance or symmetry. Within the center panel, *Panel Two*, the vertical column-shapes are positioned toward its right side. This is unusual when compared to Rothko's single canvases, where the internal elements are typically positioned to create a symmetrical balance. Further, the canvases that flank the center

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[132] See Anfam, *MRCR*, 93.
[133] See Bonnie Clearwater, *The Rothko Book* (London: Tate Gallery, 2006), 146.
[134]The fading and degeneration of these paintings is partially due to a fugitive pigment that Rothko used—Lithol Red. He also applied egg white between the layers of paint, which contributed to their fragility. Even by 1967, three years after their installation, the deep crimson red of the five murals had faded to blue-purple. For a detailed account of their deterioration, which includes technical studies, see Cohn, *Rothko's Harvard Murals*.

panel, *Panels One* and *Three*, not only vary in width—117 inches versus 96—but here, too, their pictorial elements, which suggest entrances or doorways, are off-center. Yet there is a reason for this. As Breslin has observed, Rothko's pictorial forms mirror the room's only architectural features, its windows and doors. This occurs most obviously in *Panel Four* where "The two glass doors, separated by a wall alongside the east side of the room, recur in the two broad crimson portals, separated by a black wall, in *Panel Four*, which hung just to the right of the doors."[135] The squares and rectangles within Rothko's panels do not go so far as to mimic the gridded windows at either end of the room, yet there is a sense of the forms in the paintings visually interacting with forms of the windows, a sense of repetition or call and response between their geometric orders (figs. 5.4, 5.5). These aspects, which at first might seem idiosyncratic but upon closer inspection respond specifically to the room, combined with the panels' size, scale, and opacity—achieved through the color-soaked canvas, making the pigment a part of the canvas's very structure—serve to make the paintings less pictorial and more architectonic, in appearance and in function.

When first installed, the paintings ranged chromatically from black to vermilion, rose, pink, and white. Marjorie Cohn, who was among the team of conservators who helped install the paintings in January 1963, recalled that the Holyoke canvases were similar in color to the Seagram panels and described them as "crimson canvases . . . unfurled to clothe the solid walls of the Holyoke Center penthouse."[136] According to Breslin, Rothko chose a burgundy-red ground in response to the university's school color, Harvard Crimson.[137] Before Rothko installed them at Harvard, they were first exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum, from April 9 through June 2, 1963, where Michael Fried saw them and described them as "deep wine red."[138] Brian O'Doherty described the general

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[135] Breslin, *Rothko*, 453.
[136] Cohn, *Harvard Murals*, 2.
[137] Breslin, *Rothko*, 452.
[138] Fried hated the Harvard murals and described them as "very bad paintings, the weakest from Rothko's hand I have ever seen." He found the motifs "clumsily ideographic" and the canvases "painted with a blotchy slovenliness." Michael Fried. "New York Letter." *Art International,* 7, no. 5 (May 25, 1963): 71.

color scheme as "based on one of Mr. Rothko's favorite colors—a velvety plum-purple, interrupted by columns of dusky black, red, and creamy yellow."[139] Yet O'Doherty did not like these paintings. Rather than identifying quasi-illusionistic column-shapes that protruded into the viewer's space, he found fault in their lack of illusionary, recessional space, which he felt "ties the eye to the flat surface." For O'Doherty, these paintings were much too physical. As he concluded, Rothko is "at his best (which is usually in reds and yellows) [when he inspires] metaphysical contemplations."[140]

Rothko called upon Wilder Green to assist with the installation of his panels in the Holyoke penthouse. Green had previously worked with the artist on the organization and installation of his 1961 retrospective at MoMA. Green brought more than just a trained eye to the installation; he also had a keen sense of how an artist's paintings would work within a modern architectural setting. He had studied architecture at Yale with Louis Kahn, worked with Paul Rudolph in Florida, and assisted Johnson at MoMA, where he began working in 1956. He had also recently designed the interior of the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery on Fifty-seventh Street, Rothko's new dealer. In some ways, Green was to Rothko what Tony Smith was to Pollock and Newman. They had the wood-paneled walls of the Holyoke Center's dining room covered with an olive-green fabric to set off the murals' reds. But Rothko wanted an interior unlike the chic Four Seasons and sought to create an ambiance that would be "sort of gritty."[141] Yet the penthouse proved an impossible space for Rothko's panel paintings. Its ceiling was too low, the space inflexible, and the diners' tables and chairs made it overcrowded with furniture. In the end, neither Green, nor Rothko, nor Sert was very satisfied. Just days after the panels' installation, Sert wrote to the President of Harvard University, Nathan Pusey, "My impression is that the paintings suffer from being in a dining space."[142]

A Picture Lives by Companionship

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[139] Brian O'Doherty. "Art: Rothko Panels Seen." *New York Times*, April 10, 1963.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Wilder Green in Breslin, *Rothko,* 454.
[142] Sert in letter to Nathan Pusey, President of Harvard University, shortly after the panels' installation, January 11, 1963, in Cohn, *Harvard Murals*, 9.

In the early 1950s, when large-sized paintings had become the norm for Rothko, they were regularly shown in gallery and museum exhibitions, but Rothko anticipated that his paintings would ultimately find their way into collectors' homes. In 1947 he wrote, "A picture lives by companionship, expanding and quickening in the eyes of the sensitive viewer. It dies by the same token. It is therefore a risky and unfeeling act to send it out into the world."[143] In the late 1940s and into the 50s, Rothko did not have to worry about his paintings going out into the world since no one was buying them.[144] Nor did any private individual ever commission Rothko to make a painting for his or her modernist home as Bertram Geller did with Pollock. But by the late 50s, some private collectors were acquiring the work.

There are only a few published photographs of the Rothko paintings sold to private collectors in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They include photographs of the collection of Ben Heller, who *Art News* described as the "New American-Type Collector."[145] Beginning in 1954, Heller purchased over a half-dozen Rothko paintings, a number of which were large-sized. In the late 1950s he moved to a bigger apartment since his ceiling (8 feet 7 ½ inches) proved prohibitive for the larger canvases he was collecting, including Pollock's *One: Number 31, 1950*. In his new home on Central Park West, Heller removed walls and moldings to accommodate the larger paintings, which were hung from recesses. He totally redesigned the space and built broad, uninflected walls in the style of modern architecture, which were painted white. At one end of the room he placed *One: Number 31, 1950*, which he installed on a panel that projected the painting out several inches toward the viewer. At the opposite end stood *Blue Poles* on a floating panel. In between, in addition to Newman's *Adam* (1954) and Pollock's *Echo:*

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[143] Rothko, "Statement on His Attitude in Painting," *Tiger's Eye,* reprinted in *Rothko, Writings on Art*, 65.

[144] A review of the Rothko catalogue raisonné reveals that many of the paintings of the 1940s, and 50s stayed with the artist into the 1960s; a great many were sold or dispersed by the estate in the 1970s; at present, a substantial amount of paintings remain with Rothko's daughter and son, Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko. Of those paintings sold to private collectors in the later 1950s and early 1960s, there do not appear to be published installation shots.

[145] Henry Geldzahler, "Heller: New American-Type Collector," *Art News* 60 (September 1961): 29.

Number 25, 1951, hung Rothko's *Yellow and Green* (1954), as well as his majestic *Browns* (1957) and *Four Darks in Red* (1958), both of which hung from floor to ceiling.

Until recently, J. Ezra Merkin had the largest private collection of Rothko paintings, a total of twelve, assembled between 2003 and 2008, seven of which came directly from the artist's estate and heirs. They included two studies for murals that Rothko had executed for the Four Seasons and the Rothko Chapel, each nine by fifteen feet, and a third, smaller study for a Holyoke mural. The studies were installed in Merkin's Park Avenue duplex, which David Anfam had had an opportunity to visit. Anfam reported that "Many of them are large and it achieves exactly what Rothko wanted, which was to defeat the wall. The paintings at the Merkins' make the walls dissolve. They become the environment." Heller, who guided the Merkins in their purchases, reported, "If you go up to that apartment, you would drop your socks. It's much closer to a chapel."[146]

The Rothko Chapel

> *Shortly after its opening, a visitor emerged from the chapel to ask the receptionist 'When are you going to hang the paintings?'*[147]
>
> —Sheldon Nodelman

A chapel, it seems, was Rothko's long-held ideal setting for his paintings. In the summer of 1959 Rothko came across a chapel in St. Ives in Cornwall that he seriously considered acquiring to house a group of his works; it would have served as a private museum.[148] That same year he told the German art historian Werner Haftmann that he wanted to show his paintings in a chapel.[149] The idea of a chapel or chapel-like space may have occurred to him when he saw his paintings installed in the annex that Philips

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[146] Heller in Lindsay Pollock, "Merkin's Art Adviser Bought Expensive Rothkos, Lost Millions," *Bloomberg News*, January 10, 2009.
[147] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 302.
[148] See Emma E. Roberts, "St Ives: 'Mark Rothko'," *Burlington Magazine,* 138, no. 1123 (October 1996), 702–706. Also C. Stephens, *Mark ark RothkoRothko in Cornwall* (St. Ives: Tate Gallery, 1996).
[149] See Werner Haftmann in *Mark Rothko* (Zurich: Kunsthaus in association with Marlborough Gallery, New York: 1971), ix.

had built for his work. In 1961 Robert Goldwater described one of the small galleries in Rothko's MoMA exhibition as "chapel-like" (although because Rothko and Goldwater were close friends, he may have gotten the idea from the artist). Or perhaps Rothko's idea of a chapel came from Tony Smith, who had wanted to design a church with a suite of Rothko's paintings as early as 1954. Just as Smith had envisioned individual venues for the four artists he admired most (Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still), so, too, had Rothko imagined a series of small museums located throughout the country, modest cinder-block structures, each dedicated to the work of a single artist including Reinhardt, himself, and others.[150] Their dispersed locations would mimic those of Cornish chapels, which are found over the landscape and often outside the villages. Like Smith, Rothko conflated the idea of a secular museum environment with that of a church or a chapel.

Like Newman, Rothko was not religious. He told Dore Ashton that he could never have designed a synagogue.[151] Susan Barnes writes that while Rothko said he was religious growing up, "dragging his mother to the synagogue several times a day,"[152] he lost his fervor once he arrived in America. Nor did he have any direct connection to Christianity. However, he had, on occasion, described his art as "religious," and like many artists of his time, had "expressed spiritual intentions for his art."[153] At the very least, the idea of a chapel appealed to him because it offered a quiet, solemn setting, which Rothko felt was far more appropriate for viewing his paintings than the "supermarket" environment he found in most museums.

Mark Rothko is the only abstract expressionist artist to conceive and create a cycle of paintings for installation in an architectural setting of his own design. The Rothko Chapel in Houston is the culmination of his artistic career. It is also the fullest example of the central argument under consideration here: that with certain of the abstract expressionists there arose a conception of painting that increasingly approached the feel and function of the architectural setting. In the chapel that Rothko designed to

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[150] See Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 39. See also letter from Mrs. Gifford Phillips to Dominique de Menil, November 17, 1972, in Barnes, *Rothko Chapel*, 26.
[151] Ashton in Breslin, *Rothko*, 460.
[152] Barnes, *Rothko Chapel*, 43.
[153] Ibid.

house them, these fourteen paintings with their size, scale, and materiality engage the visitor in active phenomenological viewing more than any contemporary example. Here Rothko's paintings take on the scale and tectonic opacity of the architectural plane to such a degree that the paintings do not so much eclipse the architecture as they become the architecture. Indeed, Nodelman, who has written the most comprehensive analysis of the chapel's architecture and pictorial program, claims that they are so "inextricably interdependent" and the relationship between the paintings and their surround is "so comprehensive and thorough . . . that the chapel may be described as the most ambitious attempt at the integration of painting and architecture in the twentieth century."[154]

Because of the singular achievement it represents, the Rothko Chapel has received a tremendous amount of scholarly as well as popular attention, which has made the story of how it came into being now well familiar. Therefore, the following overview need only be brief. In the late 1950s the Houston-based art collectors and philanthropists Dominique and John de Menil asked Philip Johnson to prepare a master plan for the campus of the University of St. Thomas, with which the de Menils were associated. The de Menils had proposed building an art museum for the university, but upon Jermayne MacAgy's untimely death in 1964, whom they had chosen to head the University's art department and oversee the museum, they opted instead for a chapel to serve the university's Catholic community. The de Menils history with Philip Johnson was long established; they had given the architect one of his first commissions when they hired him in 1948 to design their home, which was contemporary with Johnson's own Glass House (1949). Long and low, with a flat roof and plain brick exterior, the de Menil residence is an example of the International Style. It was the first of over a dozen buildings that Johnson would build within the city of Houston and would later become an inspiration for the Menil Collection building (1982–86) designed by Renzo Piano.

In 1964 the de Menils invited Rothko to create a set of murals for the chapel. They were inspired by artist-designed chapels in France initiated by Father Marie-Alain Couturier, including Matisse's chapel in Vence and Le Corbusier's in Ronchamp, and

[154] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 43.

Rothko was a natural choice. Not only had he and MacAgy been friends (she had organized his exhibition at the Houston Contemporary Arts Museum in 1957), but the de Menils had also seen the paintings he had created for the Four Seasons in Rothko's studio during one of their visits to New York and had been quite moved by them. In fact, the de Menils initially considered purchasing the Seagram murals for their proposed chapel, yet the artist refused, arguing that it would be impossible to adapt them to a different location and purpose than that for which they had been made. Recognizing his fervent wish to create an ensemble of paintings for a specific interior setting, the de Menils acquiesced.

The de Menils ultimately decided to build the chapel not on the St. Thomas campus but on their own property, where it now serves many purposes as part of the complex that includes the Menil Collection. There the Rothko Chapel functions more as a private museum as chapel, rather than a chapel as museum. It has no altar nor are there regularly scheduled services or Masses. Dedicated in 1971 as a nondenominational chapel, it nonetheless exemplifies sacred architecture. Rothko's ideal museum became a reality.

While the Rothko Chapel was intended to be a collaboration of architect and artist at the highest level, it did not ultimately work out that way. Three-quarters of the way through, Johnson dropped out of the project over disagreements he had with Rothko's design changes. The de Menils turned the chapel over to Houston architects Howard Barnstone and Eugene Aubrey for completion. Part of the problem was that Rothko wanted the interior of the chapel to replicate that of his studio, whereas Johnson conceived of Rothko's paintings as a decorative addition to what would have been essentially his architectural design. As Nodelman confirms, while he respected Rothko as a painter, "In the last analysis, Johnson did not value painting that highly. He was principally interested in how it would look as an accessory to his architecture."[155] Rothko, in turn, disliked architectural grandiloquence. Ironically, this was precisely the problem that Johnson had sought to address at his 1951 symposium, which was organized as an attempt to get artists and architects to collaborate more closely. Yet Rothko was the

[155] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings,* 81.

one who articulated the issue when he stated, "Mr. Johnson, I think the problem is really not simply the problem of whether a sculptor and an architect can work together, but I think the problem is precisely what sculptor and what architect or what painter and what architect."[156] As it turned out, Rothko and Johnson were unable to be that painter and that architect who could work in perfect tandem. The final resolution of the chapel's design rests so firmly upon Rothko's suite of murals that his paintings are intrinsic to its overall conception, and not decoration of a discrete architectural environment.

Rothko devoted himself almost entirely to the project, beginning with its design in the fall of 1964 and continuing through 1967 with the paintings that he generated for their possible inclusion in the chapel. Between 1950 and 1964, the artist typically produced about twenty-four canvases annually. In 1965 he did not produce a single painting that did not relate to the Houston project; in 1966, he completed a single classic sectional painting, *Untitled* (CR 805), and in 1967, a mere five canvases unrelated to the chapel. But before he could begin to work on the paintings, Rothko first needed to attend to the chapel's architectural design, specifically the configuration of its interior walls. To Johnson's credit, he contacted Rothko immediately after the artist signed the contract to consult with him on the design. But Johnson later recalled, "Rothko knew exactly what he wanted for the Chapel," adding, "So why hire an architect when you already know what you want?"[157] After having devoted so much time and energy to his two previous, albeit unsuccessful, architectural collaborations, Rothko had obviously arrived at definitive ideas about what environment best suit his paintings. He had in mind the form as well as dimensions of the chapel, but, Johnson complained, Rothko knew "nothing about architecture."[158] Yet he knew enough to know what he wanted, as well when to call on his architect friends.

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[156] Rothko statement in transcript of the "Symposium on *Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture*," the Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 19, 1951, Philip Johnson Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives.
[157] Johnson stayed on as consultant and participated in some of the final points in the definition of the building. See Brian O'Doherty, "Rothko Chapel," *Art in America* 61 (January-February 1973): 18.
[158] Ibid.

Rothko knew from the start that he wanted the chapel to be in the shape of an octagon, which he gradually revealed during the early stages of his collaboration with Johnson. Johnson had originally proposed a square-shaped interior, but Rothko was convinced than an eight-sided room would encourage a visual "surround" for his ensemble of paintings, which would not occur as effectively in a four-walled structure (like a conventional restaurant, dining hall, or gallery). The octagon's walls had to be broad enough to accommodate the grand-scale canvases he envisioned, and yet within its radially symmetric plan, the chapel would allow the viewer to apprehend a view of several paintings simultaneously from the its center. The octagonal plan also would permit the viewer to confront each painting individually. While there is a history of octagon-shaped sacred buildings, Dominique de Menil believes that Rothko based his choice of the octagon solely on how it would affect the viewer's relationship to his paintings.

Sometime during the early stages of the chapel's design, Frederick Kiesler appears to have influenced Rothko's thinking about its layout and structure. Nodelman has noticed that Rothko emended one of Johnson's preliminary sketches dated October 1, 1964, by penciling in the profile of a double-parabolic dome.[159] Rothko's softly curved line resembles the dome that Kiesler had recently planned for his Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem (1959–65), a sort of sacred museum built to house the Dead Sea Scrolls. Kiesler's white dome was intended to symbolize the lids of the jars in which the scrolls had been discovered. Similar to the Rothko Chapel, the Shrine of the Book had originally been intended for the campus of a new university then under construction, first as part of their library, then as a separate structure. Nodelman believes that Kiesler's dome convinced Rothko to insist upon a centrally focused building lit by a domelike oculus rather than accept the pyramidal roof that Johnson envisioned. Johnson clung to the idea of a funnel-like elevation, but Rothko felt that a towering roof would have made the chapel's interior feel too monumental.[160] In the end, he won.

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[159] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 51.
[160] Ibid., 52–56.

The Kiesler connection is a probable one. Rothko had known of the visionary architect and artist at least since the early 1940s, when Kiesler designed Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century. Since then Kiesler had either organized or participated in a variety of exhibitions that Rothko would have seen at the Hugo Gallery, Sidney Janis Gallery, and the Museum of Modern Art. On one occasion, the 1952 "Fifteen Americans" exhibition at MoMA, they had even shown together. Kiesler was acquainted with a number of artists and sculptors from Rothko's generation and often attended their openings, as he had at the opening of Rothko's retrospective at MoMA in 1961. At some point he and Rothko became friends, even visiting the Bronx Zoo together, where Rothko took photographs of Kiesler.[161] Kiesler's belief that works of art should be presented as integral parts of an architectural environment rather than as separate works simply lined up next to each other obviously would have appealed to Rothko. Although Kiesler had introduced the concept as gallery design in the early 1940s, he had revivified and retooled it in 1957, when he designed the World House Gallery located in New York's Carlyle Hotel.

Kiesler apparently influenced Rothko's ideas concerning the chapel's interior as well, which recalls aspects of a sculptural piece that Kiesler had exhibited at the Guggenheim in May of 1964 entitled *The Last Judgment* (1955–59). The work consists of three trapezoidal freestanding slabs that angle in obliquely toward a central table-like sculpture. Kiesler installed the work in the High Gallery, where his work was intended to take over the entire space. He wanted to create an environment in which "You can't absorb the room in one glance. You must know what's above, below . . . the totality."[162] It is possible that Rothko adopted Kiesler's layout of the environmental sculpture for his idea of an interior in which the walls did not meet at right angles, since he had told Dore Ashton in July that he wanted the interior to be shaped like an octagon. Yet the octagon itself could have derived from any number of influences. According to Dominique de Menil, Rothko had told her that he particularly liked the octagonal baptistery that he had

[161] Kiesler was also friends with Philip Johnson. In 1951, he created a large wooden sculpture, *Galaxy*, for Johnson's New Canaan Glass House. The work was later destroyed by lightening.
[162] Frederick Kiesler in "Art: An Endless Sculpture," *Time* (May 15, 1964).

seen at Santa Maria Assunta on the island of Torcello in Venice in the summer of 1959. The notion of a polygon interior may also have come from Smith, who not only based the design for his 1951 church on a hexagon, but had earlier used a hexagon as the main unit for Theodoros Stamos's house, which also featured a skylight. Rothko was close friends with Stamos (who became head of the Rothko Foundation upon the artist's death) and often visited him on Long Island.

In the late fall of 1964, once the chapel's interior had been determined, Rothko built a full-scale mock-up of three of the eight chapel walls in his Sixty-ninth Street studio, whose dimensions roughly approximated those of the proposed chapel. The studio also had thirty-foot high walls and a sloped ceiling with a skylight at its center as there would be in the chapel. The scale and proportion of the paintings in relation to the chapel's interior architecture were of utmost importance to Rothko. The mock chapel allowed him to calibrate their exact location, height, placement, and the relationship of the paintings to each other. He even devised a pulley system so that he could raise and lower the paintings and adjust them to a fraction of an inch. For months he calibrated and recalibrated the canvases' relationships within the environment. Occasionally he invited close friends to his studio, such as Dore Ashton, Brian O'Doherty, Robert Motherwell, and Theodoros Stamos, among others, so that he could study the paintings in relation to human figures, for he was not just concerned with the paintings relationship to the chapel's architectural environment per se, but how the viewer would visually and physically interact with the group of paintings. The importance of the viewer in relation to the paintings was crucial to Rothko early on, as evidenced by architectural drawings done by Johnson and emended by the artist, in which he penciled in figures and sight lines in regard to the placement of the proposed murals.

Out of the twenty paintings that he prepared for the chapel, Rothko selected fourteen individual canvases that he assembled into specific groupings: two side triptychs, a central-apse triptych, a single panel opposite the apse, and four individual panels on the facing walls. Fourteen is the number of paintings that Smith had specified for his mid-1950s Church of the Way of the Cross (which was never built), as well as the

number of canvases that comprise Newman's *Stations of the Cross* (1958–66), which he exhibited in April 1966 at the Guggenheim Museum (the precise midpoint between when Rothko began and completed the Houston commission). It is curious that both Newman and Rothko completed a cycle of fourteen paintings similar to what Smith had intended for his Church of the Way of the Cross, about which Smith likely had also written Rothko.

Diane Waldman believes that Rothko's theme in the Chapel murals is the Passion of Christ and that at one point Rothko had considered inscribing the numbers of the fourteen Stations of the Cross on the exterior of the building to indicate the location of each panel inside the structure.[163] Nodelman too insists that the paintings are religious and answer the congregation's needs "in the sense that they take as their theme the perdurable questions of human destiny and the meaning of existence."[164] However, it is unlikely that Rothko considered the paintings religious, let alone thematic. He certainly did not intend them to convey either a narrative of any sort or any content relating to a perceived dogma—which would actually constitute an incredibly ambitious program for a set of fourteen wholly abstract paintings. And there is no linear sequence that would imply any such narrative. As Robert Ryman told Jeffrey Weiss when asked about the "metaphysical side to Rothko's abstractions," "That's just in the mind of the viewer. It's not Rothko's intention. It strictly has to do with composition, color, plane, and presence, working with the wall plane. I don't believe it represents anything. It has no symbolic meaning. People can read all kinds of things into it."[165] In fact, it seems that when the chapel was originally intended for the St. Thomas University campus, the fathers of Basilian order who founded the university had asked that the design include representations of the Stations, but Rothko refused any figuration and narrative content, which is when he suggested that the numbers of the Stations might be placed on the building's exterior.

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[163] Waldman, *Rothko*, 68.
[164] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 306.
[165] Robert Ryman in "Interview by Jeffrey Weiss, 8 May 1997," in *Rothko*, 1998, 369.

With the chapel, Rothko created his own single-color environment, as Matisse had done in *The Red Studio*, which had been so influential to Rothko's development. However, he accomplished this in a purely physical rather than pictorial form. The fourteen panels of the chapel are predominantly plum, black, and purple, and contain the first hard-edged forms Rothko painted. Within each of the panels that constitute the two side triptychs, Rothko carefully measured out and masked the internal rectangles to create a hard edge. He painted the rectangular shapes black against a plum background. The single panel that faces the apse triptych is also comprised of a black hard-edged rectangle within a dark purple field. The four single panels are entirely black and the apse triptych is a deep purplish plum. It was through color and edge that Rothko sought to integrate the paintings most fully within their architectural setting. The new format conveyed a geometrical exactitude that harmonized with the interior's stark, linear, and subdued architecture. Some suggest that the dark palette reflects the inner turmoil and depression that plagued Rothko during the last years of his life. Whether or not this is true, in February 1970 he committed suicide and never saw the completed chapel or the paintings installed.

Each of the paintings measures approximately fifteen feet high. The individual panels are eleven feet wide, the side triptychs are twenty feet wide, and the central apse triptych—a solid plum—stretches twenty-five feet across the wall on which it is hung. The canvases do not cover the walls in their entirety. The walls were originally a neutral gray, but have since been painted a lighter shade, which makes the contrast between the two surfaces somewhat greater.[166] He used three-inch-wide stretchers, which gives the paintings a degree of three-dimensionality, yet Rothko also worked hard to achieve an even, uniform, and particularly flat surface. He did this by first wetting the canvas down with sponge mops so that it would shrink tightly around the support. Next, he and his assistants mixed a primary coat of dry pigments dissolved in heated rabbit skin glue,

[166] Rothko originally wanted unpainted concrete walls in order to create a textural environment, but instead he had to settle for a painted surface with a matte, neutral tone. As Nodelman notes, this indicates how important surface was to Rothko's way of thinking. Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings,* 140.

which they applied quickly in order to cover a broad expanse of canvas within a short period of time. They next applied the paint to the canvas in horizontal strokes using brushes that measured four to six inches wide. O'Doherty would later describe the paintings as "painfully inert," yet they achieved the "architectonic" effect that Rothko sought.[167] This effect likely derived, at least in part, from a book on Florentine architecture that Johnson had given him.[168] According to Herbert Ferber, "Rothko had this book open for days to photographs showing the exteriors of fortress-like buildings with massive walls in which the regular rectangles of the windows were cut out. In the strong Italian light, these rectangles seemed black against the relatively light, gray stone walls."[169] Once again, Rothko returned to an image of blank, solid walls, whose effect he had long before admired in the interior walls of Michelangelo's Laurentian library as well as its three-storey vestibule with its false doors and rows of blind windows, which the chapel paintings subtly mimic (fig. 5.6).

Stephen Polcari has described Rothko's chapel paintings as "architectonic."[170] Nodelman, too, often refers to them as "architectonic" as well as "architectonisized."[171] Eliza Rathbone notes that the Houston paintings define the interior space architecturally. What does this mean more specifically and how is this effect achieved? When the visitor walks into the Rothko Chapel, they enter into a space in which they are surrounded by Rothko's paintings. Because of the room's octagonal shape, a situation is created in which the paintings are simultaneously visually apprehended through the visitor's peripheral vision even when looking at a single canvas frontally. One is also keenly aware of the fact that no matter where one stands, there are paintings behind one. Similar to viewing Newman's paintings, the viewer must move through the installation of the chapel's paintings in order to see them, which entails the physical act of viewing by moving through an interior space. With their size, monumental scale, and lack of pictorial

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[167] O'Doherty, "Rothko," 18.
[168] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings*, 87.
[169] Herbert Ferber quoted in ibid.
[170] Stephen Polcari, "Mark Rothko. Houston," *Burlington Magazine,* 139, no. 1132 (July 1997): 505–507.
[171] Nodelman, *Rothko Chapel Paintings,* 181.

incident, Rothko's paintings in the chapel incite the viewer to slowly become conscious of their own size, being, and presence within the space. This consciousness of one's presence is further reinforced by the fact that the orientation of Rothko's chapel paintings is vertical rather than horizontal, which corresponds to the viewer's upright stance. Ultimately, the architecture and paintings of the Rothko Chapel are interdependent upon one another to such a degree that the paintings, the architecture, and the space they create form a single continuum. With the Houston chapel, Rothko's Multiforms completed their transformation into single encompassing color realms, marking the transition from wall-like paintings to paintings as walls. In David Anfam's words, Rothko succeeded in creating an environment "where walls, wall-like images, the voids of the architecture and voided pictorial rectangles commune with each other." Anfam concludes, "The ethos points beyond 'painting' as such."[172]

[172] Anfam, *MRCR*, 73.

CHAPTER SIX

The Viewing Experience as Phenomenological Experience

As Mark Rothko increased the size of his canvases, darkened his palette, and installed his paintings according to specific criteria—hung low, close together, and within smallish rooms—they became less visible as paintings and more tangible as objects. The large size and pronounced materiality of his canvases became intrinsic to his work, as they also did in the work of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. Beginning in the late 1940s, these artists initiated a shift from "seeing a painting" to "experiencing a painting" in a way that heightened the viewer's physical interaction with the work. The size, scale, and character of their painting induced viewers to not only stand before it, but to walk to and fro, forward and backward, into and out of its surrounding spatial aura. They achieved this by developing and emphasizing certain formal properties including size, directness of the application of color, depth of stretcher and elimination of the frame, opacity and fluidity of paint, and the abandonment of spatial illusionism. They also heightened painting's sense of physicality by instilling their paintings with a frontality that confronts the viewer as an experiencing body rather than a disembodied eye. This "material actuality" altered the nature of the relationship between the viewer and the art object in a fundamental way.[1] By virtue of such an interactive engagement, the viewer was no longer engaged in an illusionistic, virtual world, but in real, three-dimensional one. Ultimately, the literal object-nature of the most forward-leaning abstract expressionist painting initiated a somatic viewing experience that the minimalists, whose work also reflects aspects of architectural form, would make a defining feature of their work in the 1960s.

In the early 1960s a new generation of artists began to shift the emphasis of their work from two to three dimensions by producing what Donald Judd described as "specific objects." These artists, the minimalists, also arrived at a self-referential object

[1] See Sheldon Nodelman on "material actuality" in *Marden, Novros, Rothko: Painting in the Age of Actuality* (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1978), 26.

situated in a specific physical and temporal space that, most importantly, directly engaged the viewer as a body in space. They accomplished this by placing the work in corners or directly on the floor, as well as on walls, in a way that not only revealed the gallery as an actual place, but also turned the artwork into an object that resided within the viewer's world of everyday experience. This placement of the art object rendered the viewer conscious of moving through space. As Robert Morris put it, "The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision . . . one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships."[2]

In form and concept, minimalism has been recognized as signaling a decisive aesthetic shift, away from the canons of abstract expressionism, which in many ways it did. According to Sheldon Nodelman, the artists of the 1960s regarded the New York School "as old-fashioned, passé. Not only the formal realizations of the older artists but their values, their world view, and their mode of life were spurned, even derided, by the impertinent young. The art scene, with its relentless quest for innovation, was moving on."[3] But the minimalists never wholly rejected abstract expressionist painting; many of these artists held Pollock, Newman, and Rothko, along with Ad Reinhardt, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline in high regard.[4] For some of these younger artists, in fact, Newman represented a father figure, and his formally reductive motif of vertical bars on flat, uninflected fields of color was thought to have "created the tradition from which 'minimal' art sprang."[5] While James Meyer, one of the most recent authorities on

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[2] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture: Part II," *Artforum* (October 1966); reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1968), 228–35.
[3] Sheldon Nodelman, *The Rothko Chapel Paintings, Origins, Structure, Meaning* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 41.
[4] For example, see Donald Judd, "Jackson Pollock," *Arts Magazine,* vol. 41, no. 6 (April 1967): 32–35; and "Barnett Newman," *Studio International* (February 1970), 67-69. As Richard Shiff states, in the 1960s, Newman's paintings were thought to have directly informed the reductive look in large-scale Minimalist painting and sculpture. See Richard Shiff, "To Create Oneself," in *Barnett Newman: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2004) 67–74.
[5] Douglas Davis, "After Ten years, a One-Man Show by Mr. Newman," *National Observer*, April 14, 1969 in Richard Shiff, "To Create Oneself," 69.

minimalist art, recognizes that "minimalism emerged as a critical reading of painting," he goes on to say that "The new sculpture—so the story goes—brought the color, simple organization, and bodily scale of a Mark Rothko or Newman painting from the pictorial conceit of the wall into three dimensions."[6] Evidently, when the minimalists decided to "move on," they absorbed and reconfigured one of the most radical artistic innovations pioneered by their predecessors, which was to reorient painting in such a way that it turned outwards to directly address and implicate the viewer. Nodelman also recognizes this achievement of abstract expressionism, although he does not make the connection to minimalism. As he notes, in the paintings of Pollock, Newman, and Rothko "Composition was frontalized to direct the painting outwards at ninety degrees to the plane of the material surface and was expanded in scale so that its elements immediately engaged the entirety of the pictorial object and addressed the viewer as physically embodied and localized, not merely as a weightless and implicitly placeless eye."[7] Further, Nodelman states that the interaction between these abstract expressionist paintings and their environment, and between the paintings and their viewers were as important to their definition as artwork as was their internal compositional organization. Describing minimalism in similar terms, Alex Potts states that the minimalist object places the viewer in a position where the sense of the work as a physical presence was as important as the form it presented.[8]

Although minimalism is usually credited with initiating this new relationship between art object and spectator, we have seen that the shift began with Pollock's *Mural* (1944) and gathered force through the 1950s and 60s, culminating in the late 60s with Rothko's Houston chapel. As the paintings of Pollock, Newman, and Rothko began to take on new size and scale, they also acquired an object-nature that led to new conceptions of how these paintings functioned within space, particularly architectural

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[6] James Meyer, "Another Minimalism" in *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958–1968*, ed. Ann Goldstein (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art/Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 45.
[7] Nodelman, 35.
[8] Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 178.

space. Just as many of the abstract expressionists' paintings became increasingly integrated within their architectural environments, so did minimalist objects engage architectural concerns of space, volume, movement, and light. Many minimalist works, in fact, derive from architectural forms such as pyramids, blocks, and post-and-lintel constructions. Similar to the paintings of Pollock, Newman, and Rothko, minimalist works compel the viewer to consider the physicality of the work in real space and the relationship of his or her own body to the object and its surroundings.[9]

As the minimalists sought to generate a more active relationship between the viewer, art object, and surrounding space, they turned to theories of perception, immanence, Gestalt psychology, and phenomenology to develop a language in which to frame their purpose. However, while minimalism consciously referred to phenomenological concepts in describing the efficacy of their work, abstract expressionism's connection to the philosophy of phenomenology was more latent. Yet some viewers were sensitive to it. Consider Richard Serra, who stated, "When you reflect upon a Newman, you recall your experience, you don't recall the picture."[10] The same could be said of a Pollock or a Rothko. Although it is widely, and rightly, held that one of minimalism's greatest achievements was its ability to alter the relationship between viewer and object—to shift the meaning from the object as art to the spectator's awareness of his or her own perceptions as they move through space in and around the object—it should also be acknowledged that this fundamental transformation of the viewing experience is ultimately the legacy of abstract expressionism.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Minimalism's Philosopher

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[9] This is obviously a matter of individual sensitivity, but the work unarguably for better or worse produces a very real dynamic between viewer and work. See, for example, Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," where she describes how some viewers were compelled to first kiss, then kick, one of Donald Judd's brass floor boxes that was on view in the Museum of Modern Art. Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64 (January 1990): 44–63.

[10] Richard Serra, interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester, May 27, 1992, in *Richard Serra: Weight and Measure* (London: Tate Gallery, 1992), 25.

In the 1960s a number of critics and artists turned to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as they considered the importance of human scale, presence, motion, and sensory apprehension to minimalist sculpture. They found in Merleau-Ponty's work a potent intellectual framework with which to describe minimalist art and its aims. Merleau-Ponty was not an art critic or historian, but a philosopher who many scholars and critics recognize as "the central philosopher for Minimalist art."[11] He did on occasion write about modern art, but for the most part confined himself to painting and rarely addressed sculpture.[12] In either case his primary concern was with the philosophical necessity of the body in the very construction of the visible. Modern art for Merleau-Ponty included Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, and Robert Delauney, but it was Paul Cézanne who was key for him. He was especially drawn to Cézanne's work as a colorist and to his ability to present a perceptual experience of the world. As Galen A. Johnson notes, "Merleau-Ponty found in Cézanne a supreme example of phenomenological work with paint."[13]

Merleau-Ponty pursued the idea of phenomenology (which he based on Edmund Husserl's philosophical investigations) as a way of understanding the meaning of human consciousness by emphasizing the human body's kinesthetic, bodily presence in the world. In his most influential work, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty argued that we exist in relation to our immediate surroundings and that we know ourselves only in relation to what we touch or perceive. He also introduced the concept of "being-in-the-world," which points to the essential fact that we come to know ourselves, and the world around us, in relation to our own bodies. As he stated,

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[11] Benjamin Buchloh, in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: Dia Foundation for the Arts), 72.

[12] Merleau-Ponty does discuss Auguste Rodin's work but describes it in terms of a series of "images" of different instants of a body in motion, a "paradoxical arrangement" that "makes movement visible." See Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader, Philosophy and Painting,* eds. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 121–149.

[13] Galen A. Johnson, "Introductions to Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Painting," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, 7.

> The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. . . . we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and the fact that we are our body. . . . we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we are in the world through our body, and in so far as we perceive the world with our body.[14]

This was a departure from a traditional Cartesian view, which is predicated on a separation of mind and body. Merleau-Ponty offered a new way of thinking about viewing and visual representation, which many artists and writers associated with minimalism seized upon as a foundation in explaining the new three-dimensional objects they were creating or writing about.

Minimalism is defined as much by the writing it generated as by the artwork. Artists and critics alike published voluminous amounts of articles and essays. This literature can be narrowed down to a few key essays, which subsequent to their publication provided a foundation or point of departure for many others. They begin with Judd's "Specific Objects" (1965), which is regarded as one of the representative discourses on minimalist art.[15] Judd set the terms for minimalism in this essay, which focuses on its literal, self-evident qualities and was interpreted as a rebuke against Greenberg's formulations on modernist painting. Michael Fried concentrated on minimalism's literalist nature in his "Art and Objecthood" (1967), which is widely recognized as an early rebuke of minimalism.[16] Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture"

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[14] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Theory of the Body Is Already a Theory of Perception," in *Phenomenology of Perception*, 203–205.

[15] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," 1964, *Arts Yearbook* (1965); reprinted in Thomas Kellein, *Donald Judd: Early Works 1955–1968* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2002), 87–97.

[16] Fried criticizes minimalism for what he deems its theatricality, an aspect of the work that engages the spectator in contingent, three-dimensional space. For Fried, this engagement of the viewer negated the possibility of "presentness," which he regarded as the essential quality of modernist art. As Frances Colpitt points out, "Fried's entire criticism rests on his distinction between pictorial-modernist art and literal-theatrical objecthood." Michael Fried, "Art and

(1966), which draws upon early twentieth-century Gestalt psychology, was also widely read. Inspired by his background in performance, Morris described the experience of his work as a perceptual system inextricably related to the body, the work of art, and the gallery. Perhaps more than any other artist associated with minimalism, Morris emphasized the fact that experiencing three-dimensional sculpture cannot be reduced to conventional modes of visual perception. Annette Michelson expanded on Morris's account in "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression" (1969), an important catalogue essay written for Morris's retrospective at the Corcoran Gallery, which introduced the notion of "co-presence."[17] By this she meant the heightening of the viewer's sense of self-awareness in time and space in relationship to the sculptural object. Although Fried's, Morris's, and Michelson's accounts all varied, they each relied on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologically grounded theories of perception in that they address the alteration of the relationship between the object and the viewer. Merleau-Ponty also features prominently in Rosalind Krauss's 1966 essay "Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd," in which she described how looking at Judd's work from different perspectives effects bodily sensations in the viewer.[18] Krauss also invoked Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in a number of other discussions of 1960s sculpture.[19] She opened her 1983 essay on Richard Serra with a quote from Merleau-Ponty: "I am not the spectator, I am involved [in the situation I view]."[20] Indeed, many writers looked to

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Objecthood," *Artforum* (June 1967); reprinted in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148–172. See Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 88–94; also James Meyer, *Minimalism, Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001; 2004), 229–243.

[17] Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression," 1969, reprinted in James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 247–250.

[18] Rosalind Krauss, "Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd," *Artforum* 4 (May 1966): 24–26.

[19] Rosalind Krauss, "Richard Serra: A Translation," reprinted in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 263-4; "Sense and Sensibility: Reflections on Post '60s Sculpture," *Artforum,* vol. 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 149–156; and *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977).

[20] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 304; in Rosalind Krauss, "Richard Serra, a Translation," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), 261–274.

Merleau-Ponty because his theory of embodied viewing offered an alternative to Greenberg's formalism and its emphasis on purely optical modes of viewing art.

Merleau-Ponty's writing was contemporaneous with abstract expressionism, but phenomenology did not enter the general intellectual discussion in the United States until the 1960s, when minimalism represented the avant-garde. By the late 1960s newer intellectual currents such as structuralism and post-structuralism began to displace phenomenology as critical perspectives on new art forms and processes. Phenomenology was soon displaced, but it nonetheless had provided the minimalists with a vocabulary to speak about the radically changed attitude toward the viewing experience they championed—even if this change had been initiated by abstract expressionists such as Pollock, Newman, and Rothko, who, however, did not use phenomenology's specific terminology when speaking about their ambitions for their work.

Within the last ten years, a number of art historians have resuscitated the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to discussions of 1960s art and theory, but none has done so in relation to abstract expressionist painting.[21] When a reference to Merleau-Ponty does occasionally surface in the context of abstract expressionist painting, it is only in passing. For example, Michael Auping, in an essay on space as a void and parallel notions of the sublime in postwar painting and minimalist art, notes, "A certain reading of abstract expressionist painting and the rhetoric that surrounded it can in fact be interpreted as developing in concert with propositions of Merleau-Ponty, whose *Phenomenology of Perception* was published in 1945," although Auping does not pursue the connection.[22] Likewise, Jeffrey Weiss has suggested that one could derive a phenomenological narrative from Merleau-Ponty's writings that would correlate Rothko's painting-as-skin with the corporeal presence of the artist.[23] In an essay on color

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[21] See Amelia Jones in "Meaning, Identity, Embodiment: The Uses of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology in Art History" from *Art and Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003); Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*; and Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*.
[22] Michael Auping, "Beyond the Sublime," in *Abstract Expressionism, The Critical Developments* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc./Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1987), 148.
[23] Jeffrey Weiss, "Dis-Orientation: Rothko's Inverted Canvases," *Seeing Rothko* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2005), 56n17. Merleau-Ponty understood a painting to be a record of the painter's perceptual response to the world as he saw it, thus the painter's marks on the canvas

in abstract expressionist painting, Ann Gibson draws briefly upon Merleau-Ponty to argue that color perception is dependent upon the viewer's gaze, which "is always transposed into the problem of the body's relation to the world."[24]

In Closing

Minimalism was thought to have caused a "rupture" with Greenberg's modernist aesthetics or at least enacted a "crux" between modernism and post-modernism, as Hal Foster characterized it in his well-known essay, "The Crux of Minimalism" (1986).[25] For some, minimalism's rupture threatened modernist art and even signaled the death of painting. Foster argues that minimalism figures as a "*brisure* of (post)modern art, an in-between moment of a paradigm shift."[26] Champions of modernist art such as Greenberg and Fried tended to dislike minimalist art and either ignored it or condemned it. Yet despite the complexities of both abstract expressionism and minimalism in themselves, and accepting the real difference between them, perhaps the "rupture" or "crux" that marks their legendary divide is not nearly as absolute as commonly thought. Indeed the shared focus on the materiality of the artwork and on the integrity of its placement within space, to the end of effecting a somatic, phenomenological experience of the work in real space and time, suggests not so much a break as a continuum.

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made visible to the viewer the painter's way of seeing things. As a result, the viewer's experience of the painting mirrored the painter's process of making the work, which, by extension, implicated the painter's corporeal presence.

[24] Ann Gibson, "Regression and Color in Abstract Expressionism: Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 55, no. 7 (March 1981): 144–153.

[25] Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals, A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945–1986*, ed. Howard Singerman (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 162–183.

[26] Ibid., 162.

FIGURES

Fig. 2.1. Jackson Pollock in front of unpainted canvas for *Mural* (1943–44), 46 E. Eighth Street studio, New York, summer or early fall 1943.

Fig. 2.2. Jackson Pollock, *Mural.* 1943–44. Oil on canvas. 7 ft. 11 ¾ inches x 19 ft. 9 ½ inches.

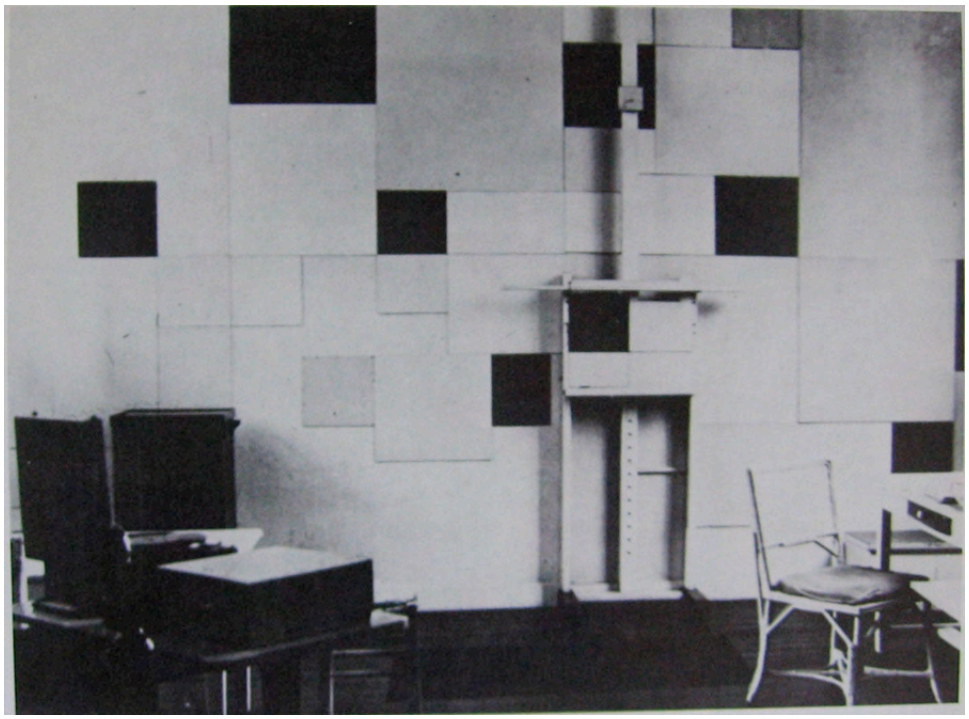

Fig. 2.3. Piet Mondrian's studio, Rue du Depart, Paris, circa 1931. Mondrian has placed his easel against the wall in such a way that the painting he is working on has become an integral part of the wall pattern.

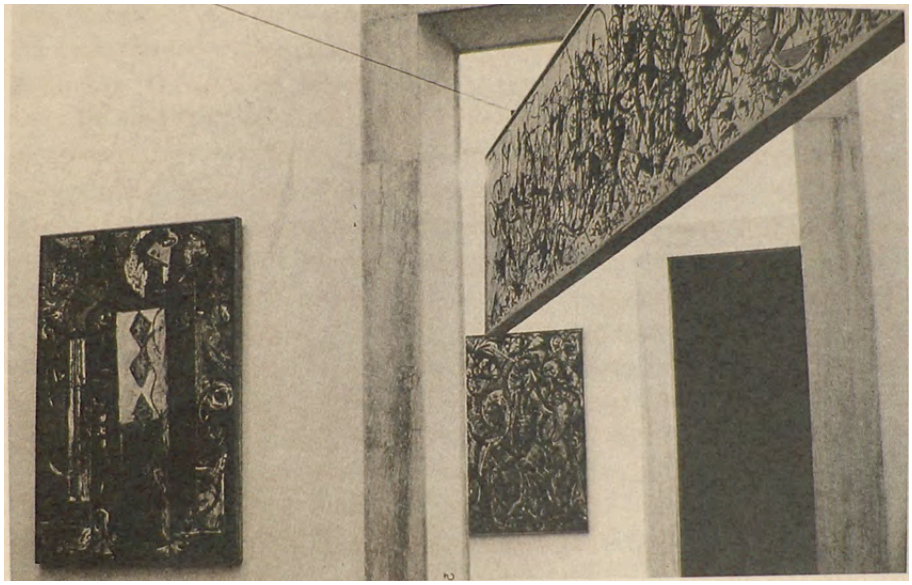

Fig. 2.4 Installation view of the exhibition “Jackson Pollock 1912–1956” at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, Rome, March 1–30, 1958.

Fig. 2.5 Installation view of the exhibition “15 Years of Jackson Pollock” at Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, November 28–December 31, 1955, with *White Cockatoo: Number 24a, 1948* on the ceiling.

Fig. 2.6 Jackson Pollock, *Alchemy.* 1947. Oil, aluminum, enamel paint, and string on canvas, 45 1/8 x 87 1/8 inches.

Fig. 2.8. Jackson Pollock and Peter Blake with their model for an "Ideal Museum," at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1949.

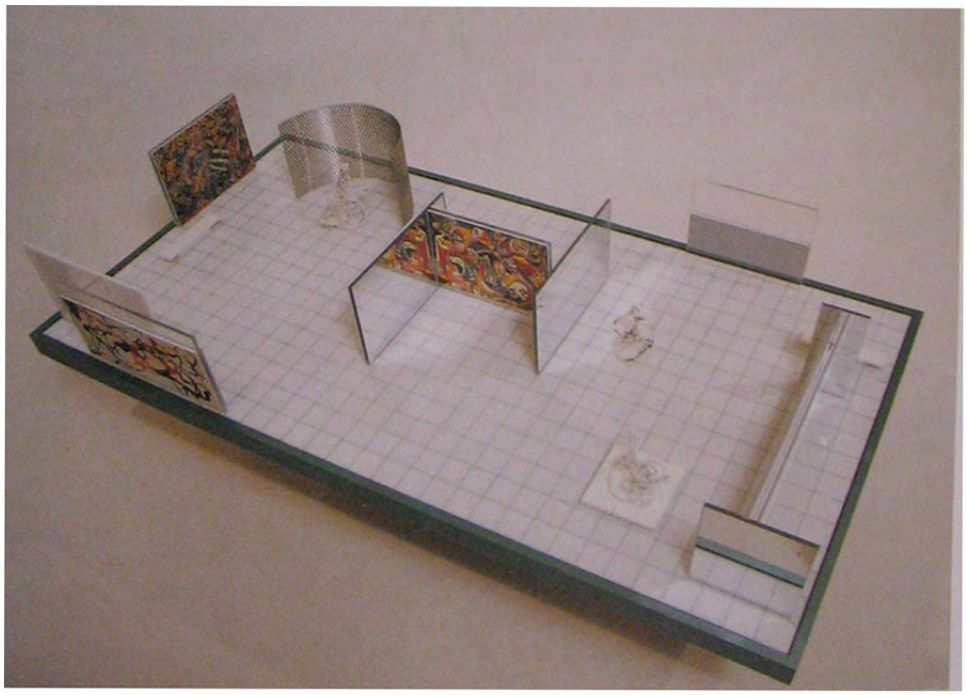

Fig. 2.9 “Ideal Museum,” reconstructed model (1995).

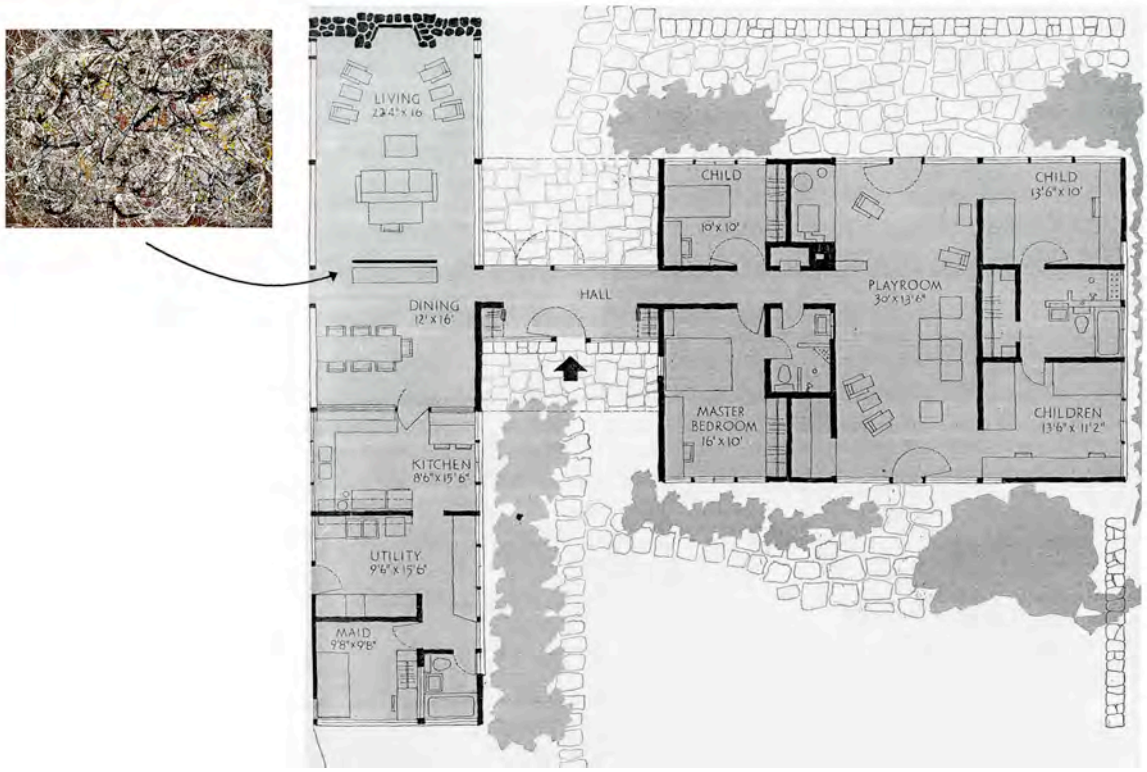

Fig. 2.10 Plan of the house Marcel Breuer designed for Mr. and Mrs. Bertram Geller, Lawrence, Long Island, New York, 1945, with indication of the placement of Jackson Pollock's *Mural* (1950).

Fig. 3.2 Fritz Bultman in his Provincetown studio, 1949.

Fig. 3.3 Tony Smith, sketch of Stamos House, Greenport, 1951; Stamos House under construction; Stamos House.

Fig. 3.4 Henry and Betty Stone House, Bernardsville, New Jersey, under construction, c. 1947–48.

Fig. 3.5 Tony Smith. *Mural.* Circa 1949–52. Oil on four Masonite panels, 9 feet, 6 inches by 13 feet, overall. The Newark Museum, New Jersey.

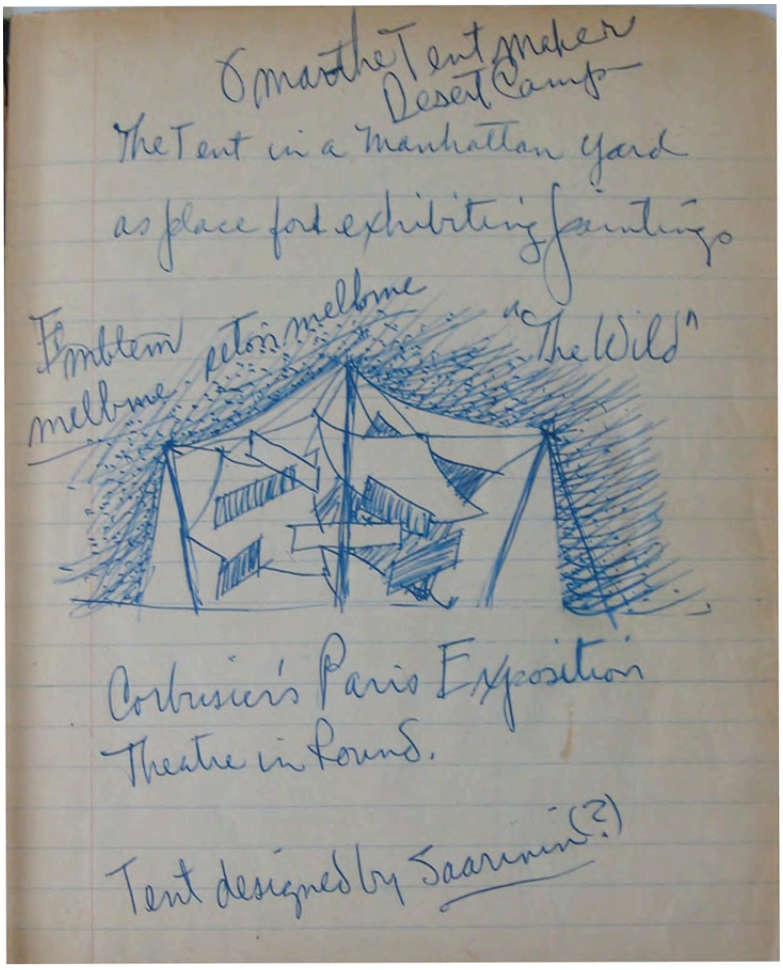

Fig. 3.6 Tony Smith, sketch of exhibition tent, c. 1951, notebook page. Tony Smith Estate Archives.

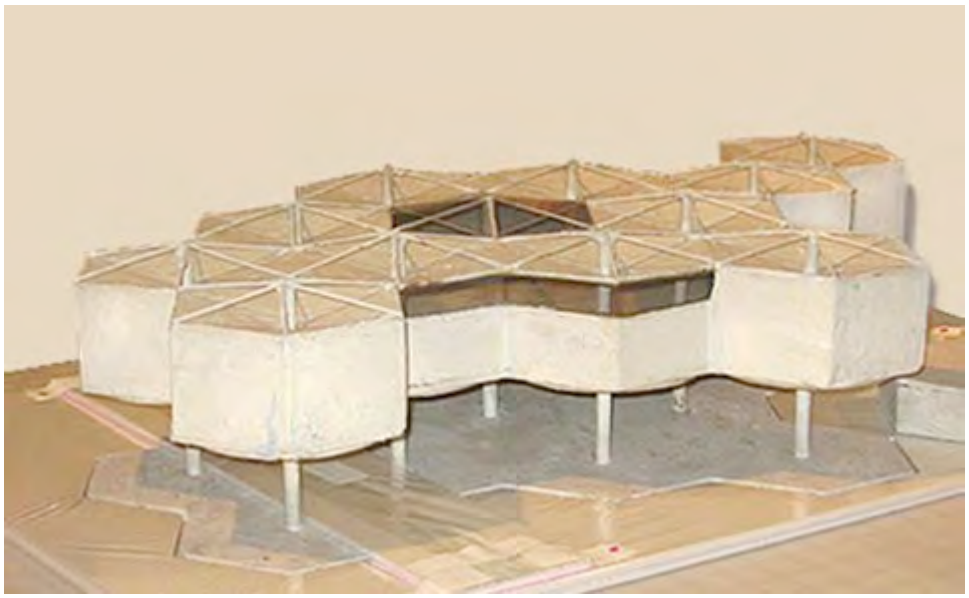

Fig. 3.7 Tony Smith. Church. 1951. Model. Wood and cardboard with paint and plaster, 6 ¾ x 18 1/2 x 29 inches.

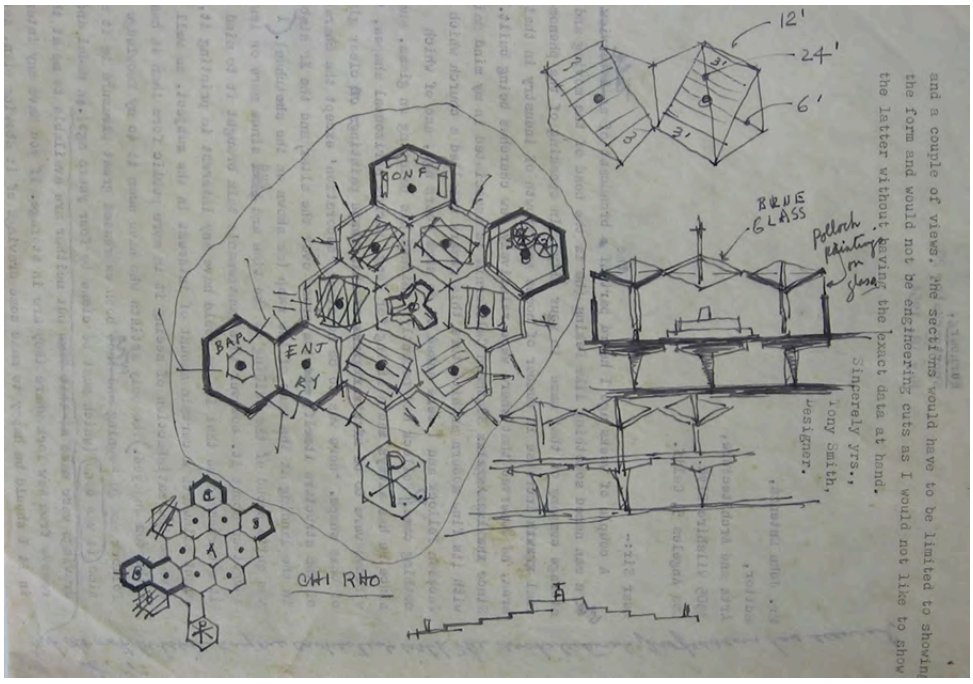

Fig. 3.8 Tony Smith, sketch of his plan for a church indicating "Pollock paintings on glass." 1954.

Fig. 3. 9 Fred Olsen, Jr. House. 1951; 2010. Guilford, Connecticut.

Fig. 3.10 Fred Olsen Sr., House. 1951–53. Guilford, Connecticut. View of the guesthouse with ramp.

Fig. 3.11 Fred Olsen Sr., House. 1951–53. Guilford, Connecticut. View from the guesthouse of the ramp and fan-shaped gallery.

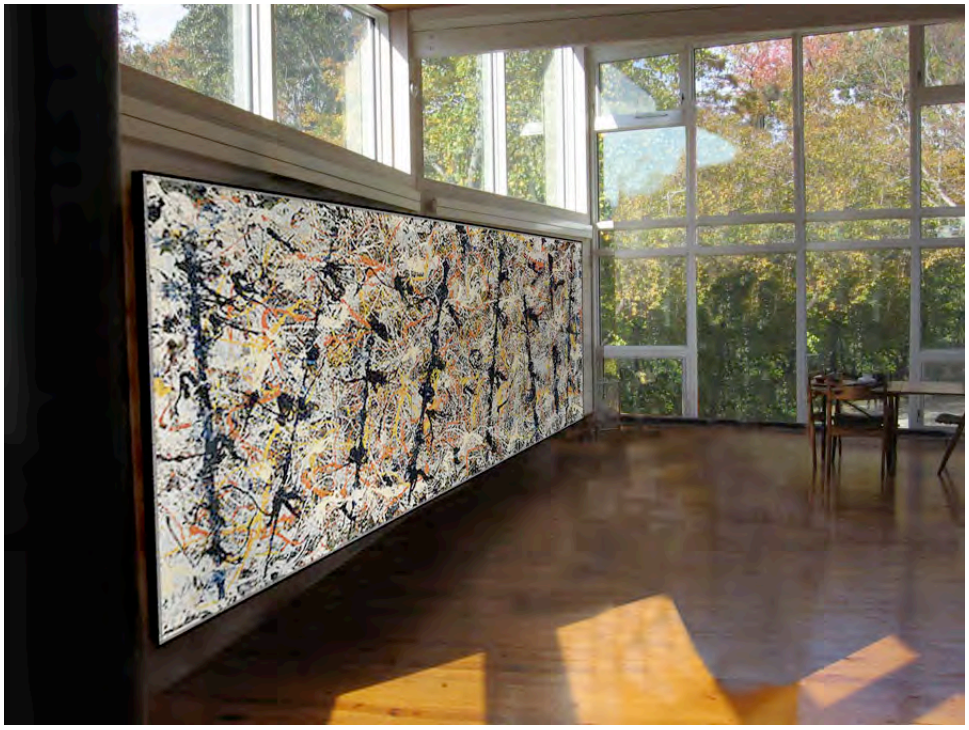

Fig. 3.12 Image of how Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* would have appeared installed in Fred Olsen Sr.'s studio/gallery.

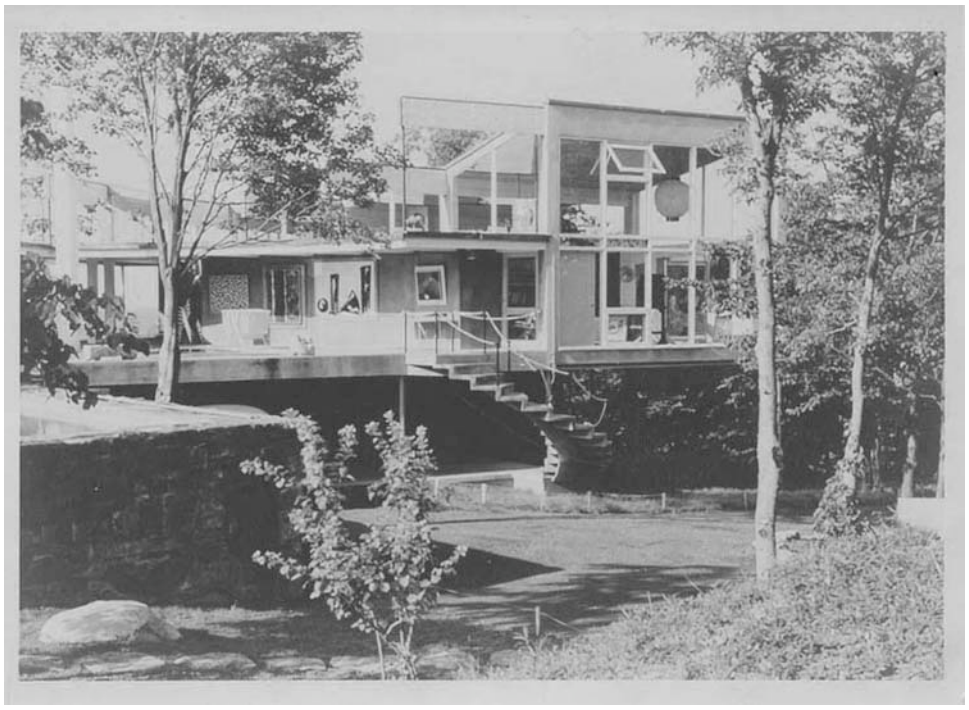

Fig. 3.13 View of Olsen studio with paintings hung on exterior wall. 1953. Guilford, Connecticut.

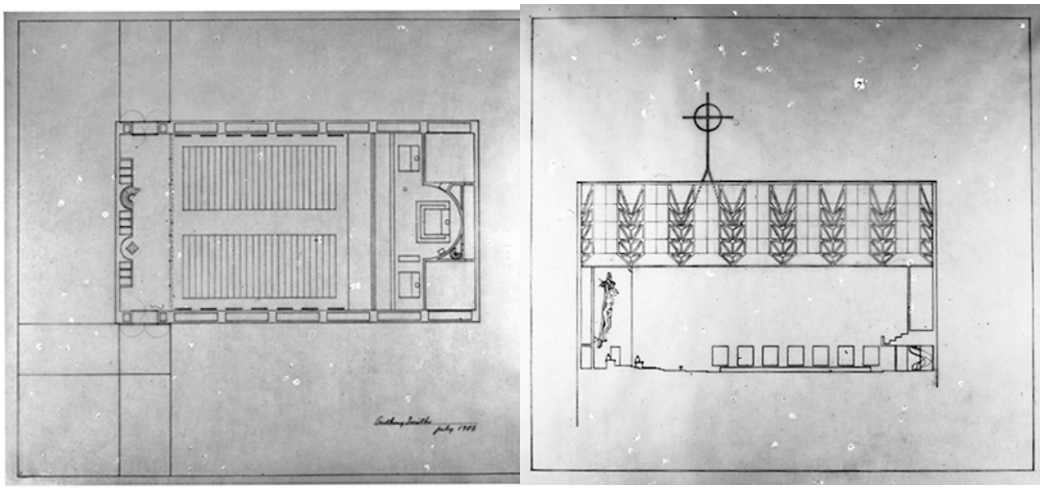

Fig. 3.14 Tony Smith. Drawings for *Church of the Way of the Cross*. July 1953.

Fig. 4.1 Photograph of Barnett and Annalee Newman's gravesite in Montefiore Cemetery, Queens, New York, with headstone and markers designed by Tony Smith.

Fig. 4.5 Map of the Marietta, Ohio, earthworks.

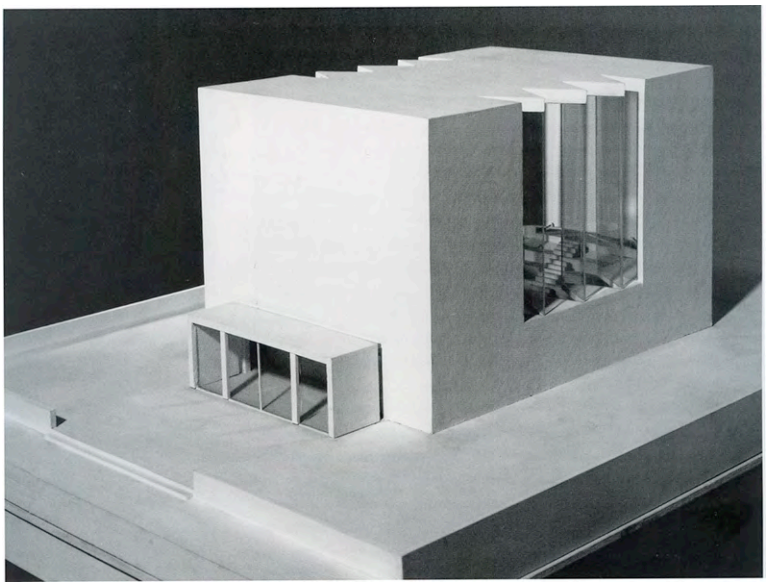

Fig. 4.6 Barnett Newman. Model for a Synagogue. 1963.

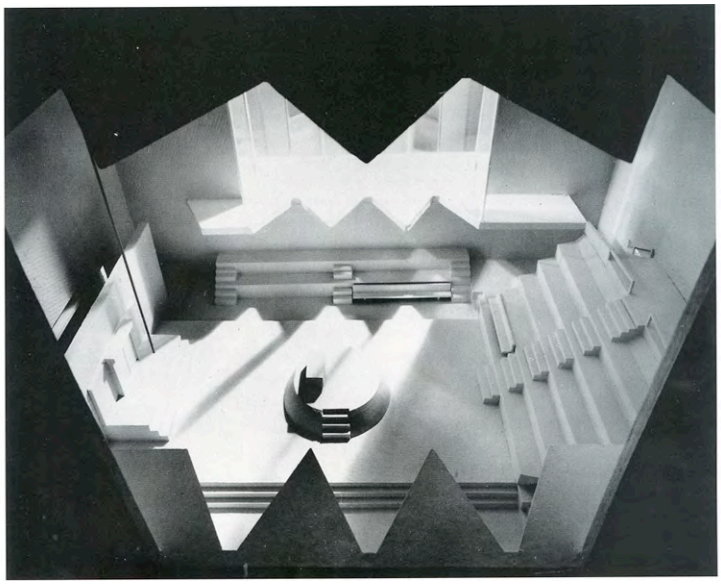

Fig. 4.7 Model for a Synagogue. 1963. Interior View.

Fig. 4.8 Barnett Newman. *Zim Zum*. 1969. Cor-Ten steel. Overall height 8 feet, length 15 feet, depth 6 feet six inches.

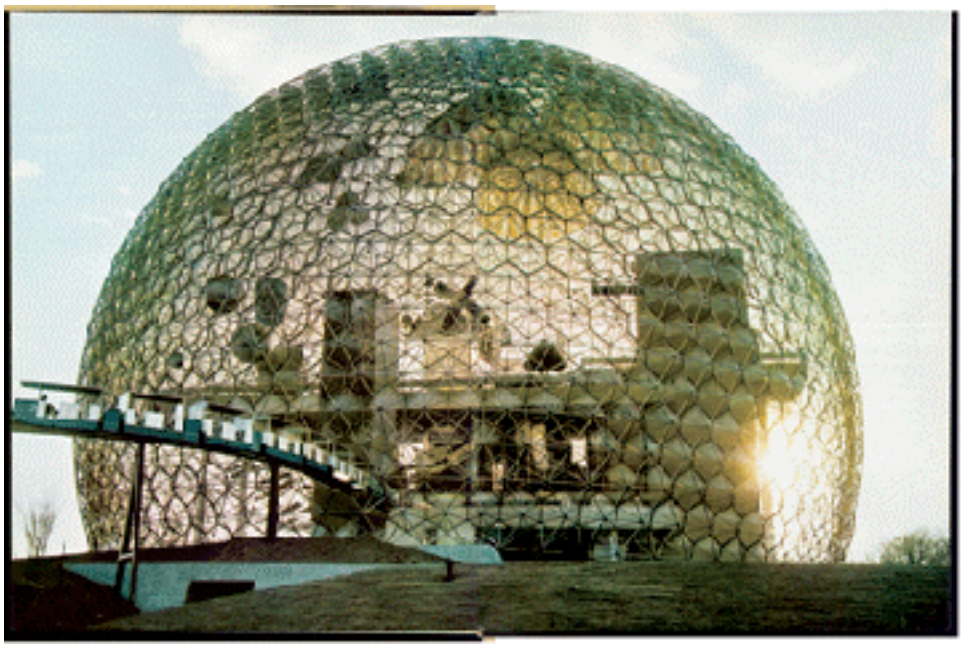

Fig. 4.9 United States Pavilion Montreal Expo 67. Buckminster Fuller, 1967.

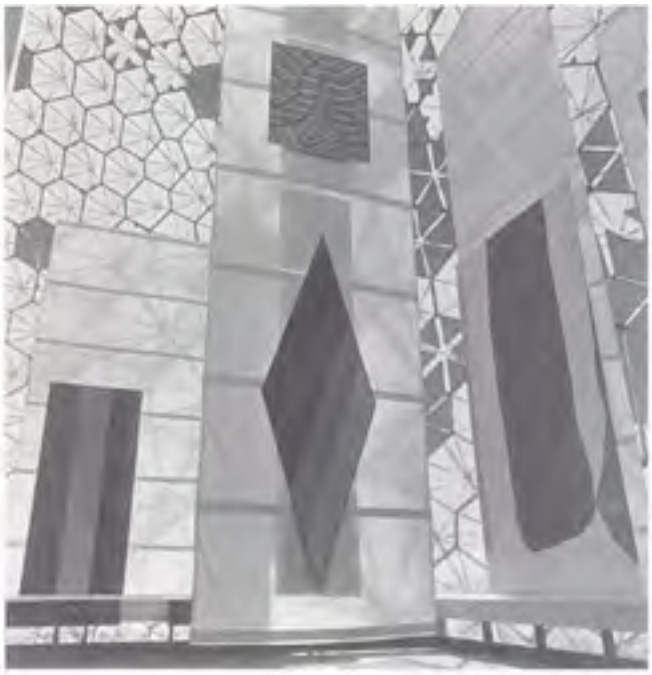

Fig. 4.10 Interior of the United States Pavilion Montreal Expo 67 with paintings Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire* along with paintings by Nicholas Krushenick, Kenneth Noland, and Helen Frankenthaler.

Fig. 5.1 Mark Rothko. *Untitled [Study for Social Security Building Mural]*. 1940. Oil on gesso board. 18 7/8 x 13 7/8 inches.

Fig. 5.2 Installation views, "Mark Rothko," Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, 1955.

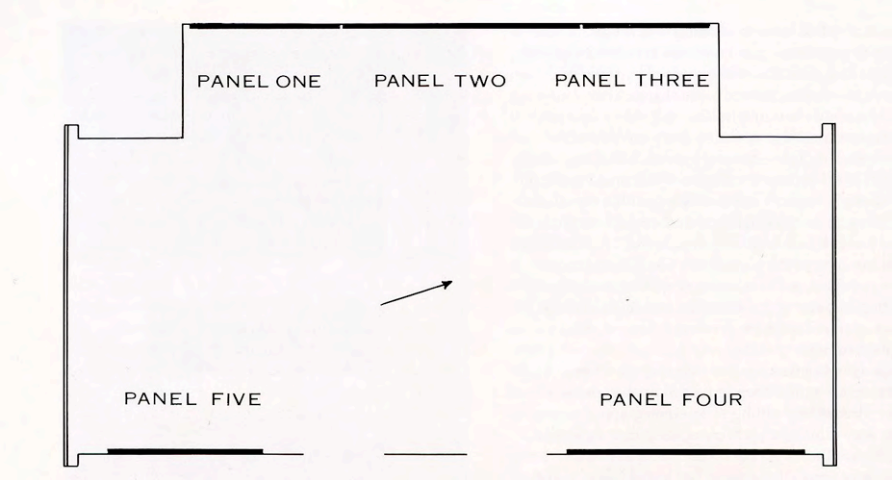

Fig. 5.3 Plan of Mark Rothko installation in the Holyoke Center, Harvard University, 1963.

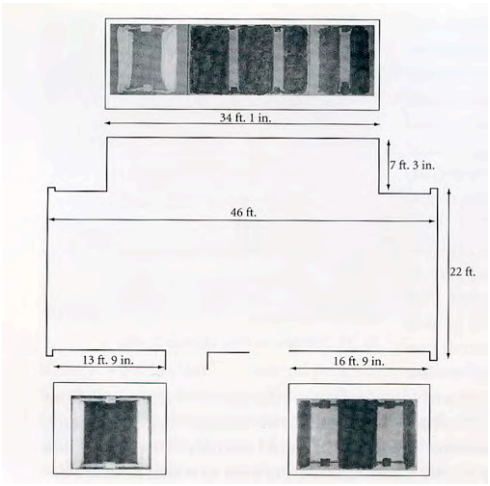

Fig. 5.4 Plan of Mark Rothko installation. Holyoke Center, Harvard University, 1963.

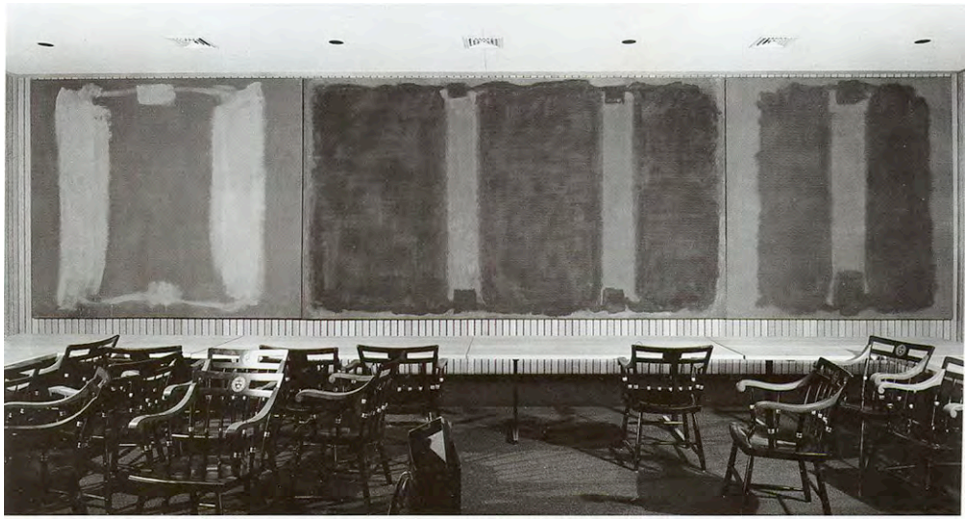

Fig. 5.5 Mark Rothko. *Panels One, Two* and *Three* [Triptych]. Holyoke Center, Harvard University, 1963.

Fig. 5.6 Mark Rothko. Installation view, north wall, Rothko Chapel, Houston, 1991.

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